

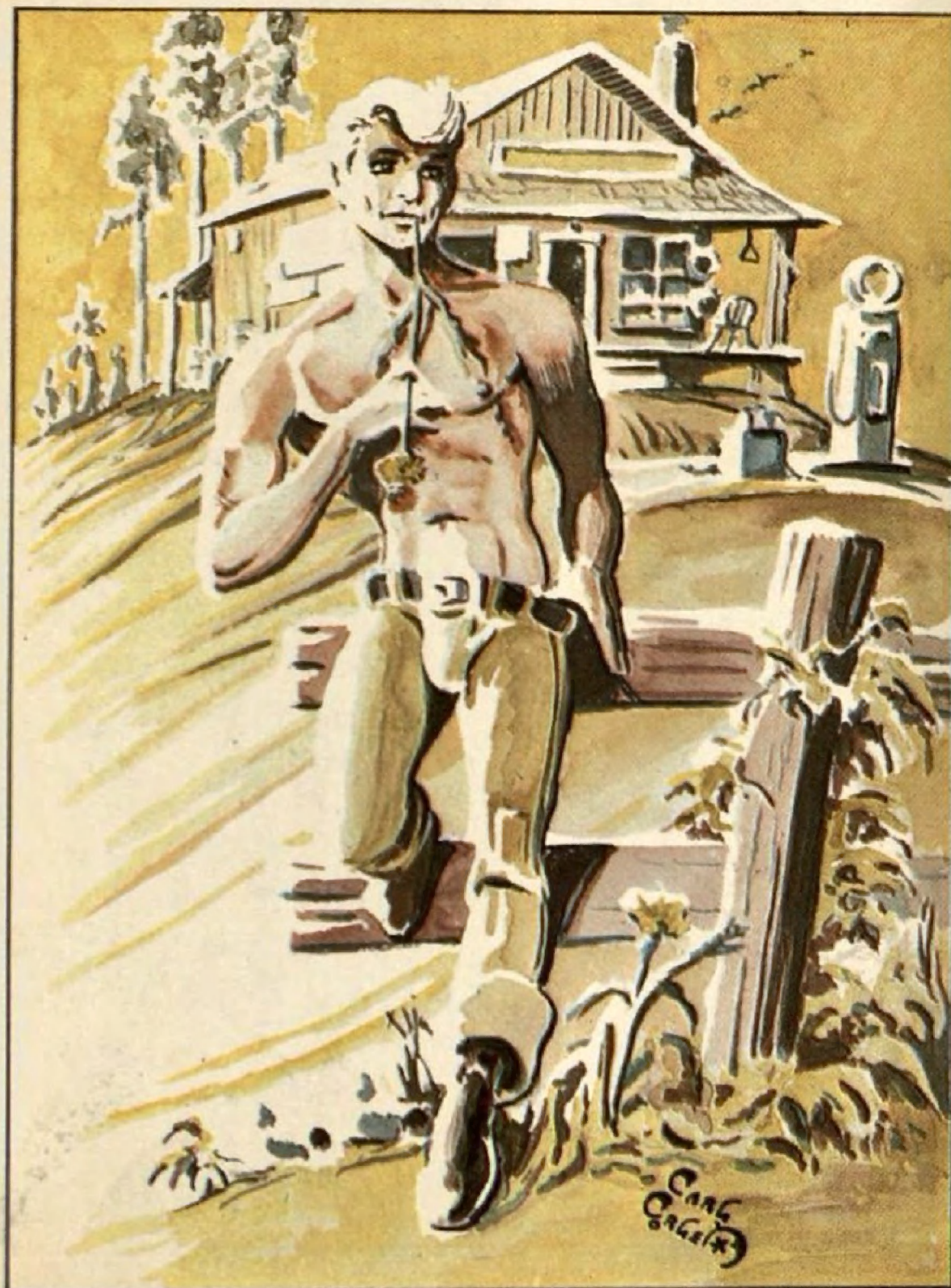
A FOOL'S ADVICE

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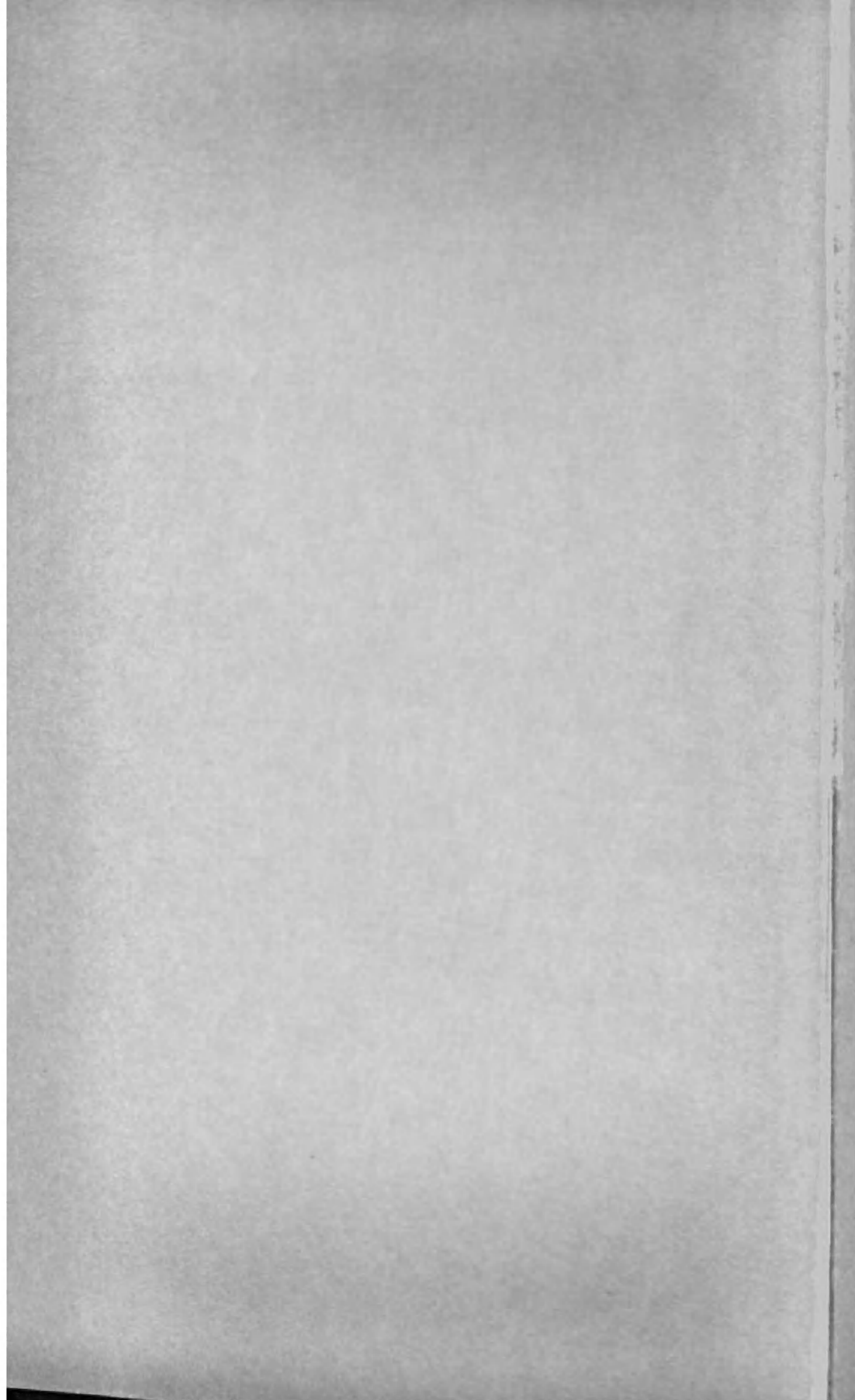
French Line -9

A PAGAN
OF THE WILDS
TRAPPED BY
CIVILIZATION

BY CARL CORLEY



THE FINEST IN ADULT READING



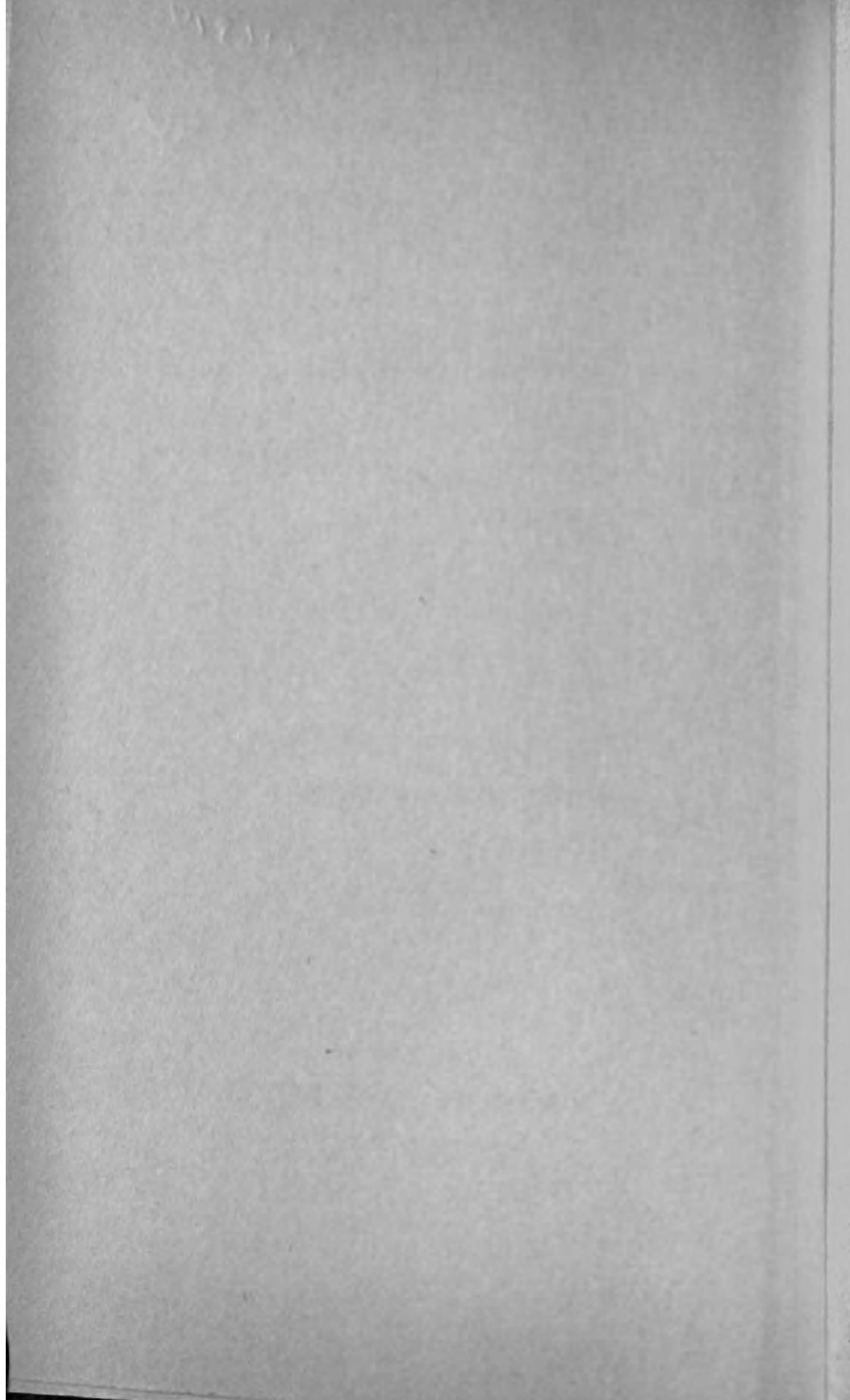
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A FOOL'S ADVICE

by
CARL CORLEY

All characters and situations
in this book are fictitious.

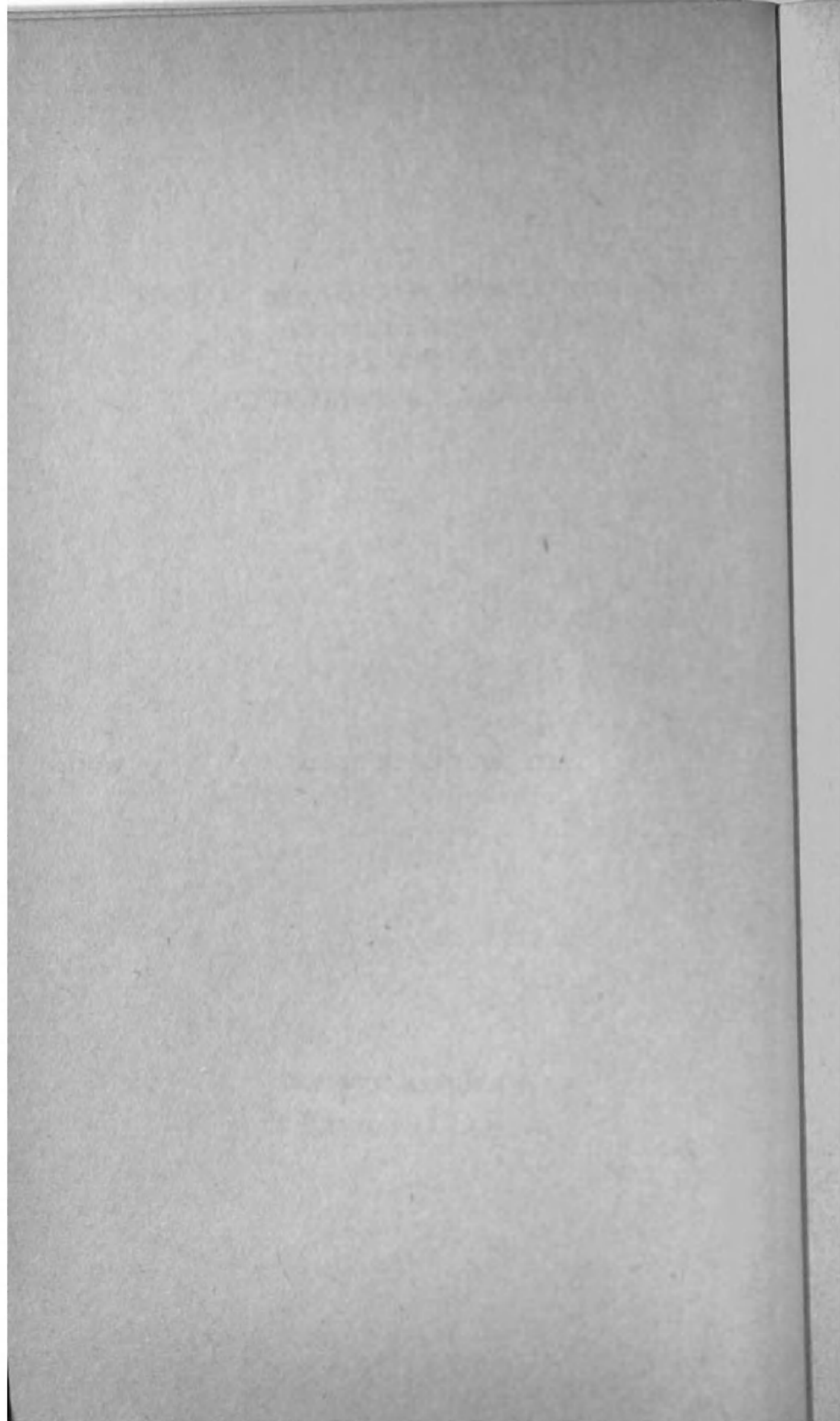
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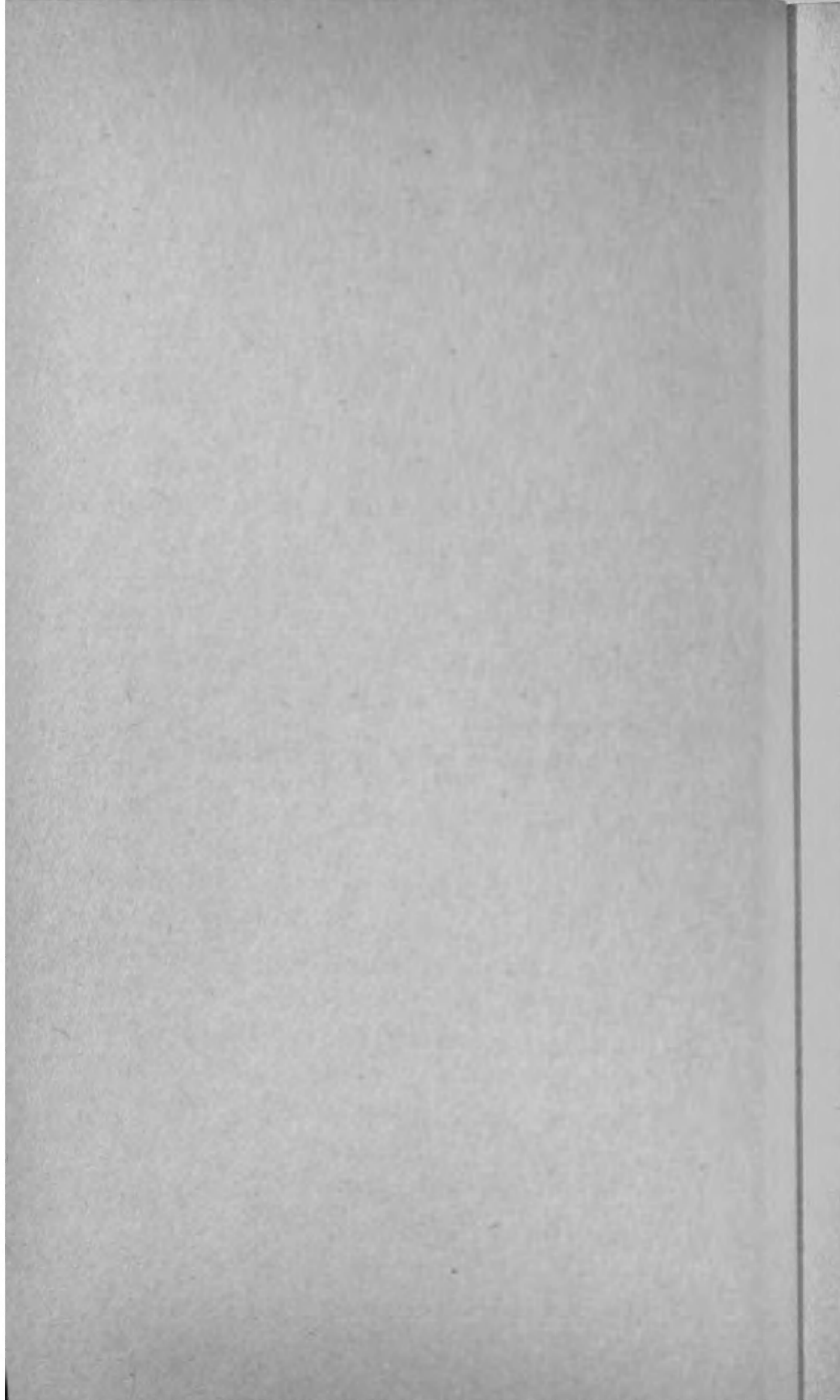
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Take a fool's advice—
—turn your back upon this kind of world.



CHAPTER ONE

Well, it is all gone over now, the trouble and the struggling. And as I set out to tell this tale, I doubt that some will know, right off, what I am telling, not knowing anything about this strange love, and will think me a little weird for telling it at all. Many will know, and right off they will recognize something in my story that will be akin to themselves, since no man stands alone in his thinking and doing. They will know of this strangeness . . . this something which sets them apart from all others. They will know about the glory of it, the strange ecstasy, the fear, the sadness, the heartache, and above all else they will know about the loneliness. Those who do not know, will know in good time.

I was listed in the family Bible as Cutlar Ragan, but since early childhood I was known by no other name than Cutty. But what's in a name? It's what's inside a person that counts. It's what he does. It's what he becomes. Maybe we are what we are from the very beginning. Sometimes I think we are. Or at least that is the way it was with me. Long, long ago I knew I was not like the others. They were all one. I was another. I think I knew mostly because I was an only child,

and had plenty of time to think while I was growing up. Too, my parents were alien to me, even alien to each other. They went about their simple worlds, bordering each on the other's, but never intruding; threading their lives with individual threads, careful that one never tangled with the other. And I was somewhere in the middle, treading mine, careful too I suppose not to engage my life with theirs. It was not that they did not love me. I know they did, and it was not that I did not care for them. It was simply that we had nothing to share with one another.

We lived on a little farm ten miles from the settlement of Brandon, the county seat, which lies almost center in the state of Mississippi. Our house was made of logs, a dog trot, with a central hall so wide it was rumored that hounds chased rabbits down it in the winter time, its foundation of limestone, which raised the building itself about three feet above the red soil which lay beneath. Cypress singles formed the roof, which we could see above the huge beams, for the house was not sealed, with cracks so wide I could see the stars through them as I lay on my cot and wondered, dreamed. It sat on a bare knoll, devoid of flowers except for a cape jasmine or two, a few stringy rose bushes, and several beds of yellow narcissus. Down by the front gate, which lay near the main road, brambles of honeysuckle foamed over with fragrance, mingled with the odor of blooming china-berry trees and one magnolia, and it was at this gate—which

opened out onto the world, the dirt road that led east and west, the artery of my life, that I day-dreamed the most.

After supper, I would go out to the gate and sit on it until the stars came out and the lightning bugs sprinkled the darkness with tiny magic lanterns, and I would wait and wonder and listen, for what I did not know. The nearest neighbor lived two miles down the road, and they rarely if ever found the time or purpose to visit us. Sometimes the preacher came on Sunday and spent the day. During summer vacation from school a cousin or aunt from way up at Kosciusko would come down and stay for a week or two, but they were never interesting to me. They were dull, trite, to say the least, with their north Mississippi twang, and their constant complaints, and their endless lamentations about farming, harvesting. Constantly, they mulled over who had married who, who had died, who had given birth, and illnesses in the family.

Born with a sense of alertness, of vivid curiosity about all things, mostly things of nature, but acutely things about people, life for me, during my growing years, was a thing of complete boredom. A boredom with people, but not for life itself. I loved life. I drank it into my being, even in the simplicity of its existence. Too, I had a common heritage with earth, of rural things, of the soil and the quietness and the smells of growing things, and I loved all this too, the old weather-beaten, unpainted house, the barn and outhouses, the bare red hill naked of

grass, the rolling pastures in front of the house leading down into the valley toward the Fullerton place. I loved it without knowing that I loved it. And I lived in contentment I suppose, especially at dusk and early morning, when there was a strange beauty about the place, the deep fragrance of the honeysuckle, the smell of the pond after a rain, the red soil turned by the plow, all the things nature gave me that no man could, that no one could, not even my parents. I was nature's child, born of small frame, petit as an elf, wiry, but literally filled to the brim with life. Dark of skin and jet black of hair, when I reached sixteen I was the picture of health. Country born and country reared and country fed, back in those days of 1926, living out of doors in the sun and fresh air, entrusted with a high hope in human nature, and a curious appreciation of all things, pure to the point that I never saw evil in anything, I was the natural booty for the men who were, in time, to shape and alter my life.

At that time Papa and Mama had saved a little from a good cotton crop, five bales if I remember, and papa put up a little store and filling station next to our house. I was elated. This meant people. And I wanted—needed people. People like myself . . . whatever I was.

In short order I grew to love that too, the stacks of merchandise with their bright shiny labels: Arm and Hammer Soda, Garrett Snuff, Sunshine Oranges, celluloid shoe horns and shoe lacers, shell combs, hard candy jaw-breakers in huge round jars

Bull Durham tobacco, smelly brilliantines and cologne in crystal clear bottles, Dipsy Doodle box candy with a pretty girl on the top, straw fans with Japanese scenes in varied colors, cow feed which smelled like honey, mule harness with their rich new leather odor, bright silver tubs and wash pans and coal oil decanters, cloth by the bolt, high heeled shoes for women which buttoned almost to their knees, spats for men, canes with brass knobs, bonnets with gaudy feathers and wax flowers, magazines and the silver screen publications which caught my eye, pulp editions of *The Electrical Experimenter*, and *Modern Electrics* with stories about Ralph 124C41, and adventure tales by Hugo Gernsback, and *Amazing Stories*, and Love and Romance magazines printed on rough yellow paper, and once a week, Sunday comics in full color. The pine sideboards, with wide shelves, were stacked to the rafters with every article gloried over, admired, and purchased by country hill people. And there was about the store, with its metal signs nailed to the outside, advertising pop drinks and tobacco and snuff, an odor and a nostalgia that I will always carry in my memory. Even today, when I have an opportunity to ride through the southern countryside and am fortunate enough to come across one of these old country stores (they are fast vanishing from the American scene) I always park and linger inside them for awhile, sniffing old, well-remembered smells of dried apples, corn, crackers, tobacco, new leather, calico and honey.

On week days after school, Papa let me tend the store, and I always had it for a full day and night on Saturdays.

This was the day I loved the most, for the local boys would be there to buy pop drinks and jaw breakers, and to browse around the magazine stand thumbing through the books and publications. Too, cars would stop for gas, sometimes tourists crossing the country, and we got a chance to gloat over the shiny coupes and roadsters and the well-dressed people inside them, the fenders loaded with suitcases, hat boxes, and picnic baskets.

One of the boys, Randy, who was in the same grade as I, the tenth I remember, always paid me unnecessary attention or what I thought was unnecessary attention. He insisted on helping me with filling the gas tanks, the oil, the water for the cars, and always pumped up the gasoline when a customer left. Too, he always seemed to linger around closing time, helped me with storing away goods on the counters, sweeping up, and locking the window shutters and the front door. And he would always ask me to walk part of the way home with him.

Randy was a good-looking boy, a head taller than me, broad shouldered, dark brown hair and eyes, and with a dimpled smile that always won people to his ways. He always came dressed up on Saturday nights, his knee pants and stockings displaying muscular legs and calves, his scottish plaid car coat bringing out the bulk of his chest and shoulders, and his Dutch boy cap riding on the

back of his curly head in a cocky fashion. He laughed a lot, laughed actually at anything anyone said, funny or not, and he had a way of laughing with his eyes which always excited me a little, though I did not know why. Though he mixed with the other boys our age, and was as friendly as expected, I suppose, he sought me out . . . when I was waiting on a customer, talking to someone else, or just tidying up the store, putting things in place that were taken down for someone's inspection and not put back, or taking inventory of the stock . . . he always seemed to be around, his warm breath on my neck, his dark eyes smiling. Other boys paid me attention too . . . but never like Randy Denium.

I blamed all this on my small stature, five feet three, and my one hundred and twenty-six pounds. I was "cute" to them, not like the sissified boy in the twelfth grade, who walked somewhat like a girl, who curled his hair and wore burnt match black on his eyes, but cute because I was smaller than they and lent them an excuse to pick at me. They were always rumpling my long dark hair, which I tried to fashion like one of the cigarette adds in the store, patted me on the behind, and went out of their way to tease or pull some prank. I loved this attention, to say the least, and actually felt a tinge of disappointment if they seemed in any way to slight me. Why I felt this way I was not certain. I knew nothing about the facts of life, had been no further than thirty miles from home, and was untried, my body yet to blossom and burn with the agonies of

desire. Truthfully, at that time, I was as sexless as a leaf.

I know now that it was they, these hot-eyed, tantalizing country boys, full of pranks and good nature, abundant in good health and energy, simple because their whole existence was of a simple nature, who awoke me, arousing within me the passion, the ecstasy, the despair, the loneliness I feel today. It was they who turned the key in the lock. It was they, these reckless southern boys who milled around my papa's store on Saturdays, who opened my eyes to passion, who converted my every thought, my every energy, my every ambition to the love of my own sex, who, through no will of their own, borne by no fault of their own doing, robust and healthy by no act of their own existence, lifted my soul to their altar block, my own body the sacrifice for their pent-up passions, my ignorance, my willingness . . . their ravishment.

It was triggered like the clap of thunder, like the white flash of lightning, lighting up our souls like mid-day in the gory anarchy of ourselves, what we were because of it, what I became because of it; though they went their way while I, torn and discarded like a soiled, broken toy when they are through playing with it, was left to lick and mend my wounds.

The brutality of the male I saw, and was to see for the balance of my existence. Though he is tender, he, too, is merciless, and I was and still am at his mercy.

The spoils of war thrown to the conqueror. These flashy, hot-eyed boys, with their soft drowsy drawls, their languid strides, their easy happy-go-lucky grace, conquered, as I surrendered.

Had there been someone to tell me, to lend a hand in guidance, for one moment during my youth to reach out to grasp me from the pit into which I plunged, I would have been saved, spared the brutality of man in his worst and best form, for I was gullible to a fault, eager to learn, anxious to behave in accepted fashion.

But there was no one.

Mama was a dreamer. Long since she had cut herself off from life in the fanatical love for religion ... which was not religion at all ... but a gorge of thought down which she descended, groping blindly, until, religion and the love of God turned into verse; memorizing and praying, her bony, field-hardened arms lifted to a God she had created for herself, which was not a God at all, and she was left in a kind of hazy state, existing only on the border line of my world, Papa's world, even her own physical world. Verse and prayer and interpretation swamped her being, dulled her to apathy; and to life and Papa, and all my love swept past her on the road to life like a signpost long passed.

And Papa, big and ape-like in stature, stooped forward when he walked, his body bent from labor and servitude, his pale blue eyes cold, penetrating. He had no word of advice for me, for he could not even advise himself. He moved in his own world

like a being who does not quite know where he is, a figure in the darkness, going to and fro in his work like something mechanical, moving because someone has pulled a switch, turned a crank. An ox, a thick-witted, strong-willed, primitive ox.

What had changed the tenor of their lives I did not know then, nor was I to learn for many years to come. Whatever it was, whatever had come between them, had no place in my own existence, and I wondered at times—when I grew older—if they had ever loved, if they had ever laughed together, like young people laugh when they are in love, if they had ever kissed, embraced, said sweet things to each other.

Yet . . . they must have done these things once, for I was physical evidence they had . . . one more eager, blameless creature come into the maddening scheme of things.

One Saturday night Randy drove up in his roadster about the time I was locking up, and he asked me to go riding with him. So I went. I climbed in beside him, not having to bother to tell mama and papa where I was going. I never told them. For long since I had come and gone on the farm as I pleased. Many nights I had gone walking through the woods, down to the pond to listen to the frogs chanting, or over in the far pasture where I would build a small campfire and sit around it by myself, watching the sparks go up into the darkness, just sitting there thinking, loving the night, the sounds, the smells, the cracking of the wood, wondering . . .

dreaming.

So . . . when I was abroad in the night, as my life in the future was to lead me, like a kitten on a string, they harbored on their worlds, living out their existence, allowing me to live out mine.

Papa had always said I was "addled," or "touched in the head" due to my mooning, my day dreaming, and my wandering off alone at night. And mama had always corrected him by saying I was a *special child*, born for something *special* in life.

How wrong they both were. But who was I to tell them?

An later times I blamed them for my despairing condition. I blamed their negligence for my preverted nature, their lack of attention to my malformation, my sudden transformation from normal manhood to something else, but it was Randy, and Randy alone, that casual fall night back in '26, who unwound my thread of life as we went together down into that dark endless chasm, from which I was unable ever after to follow the thread back.

Randy, and boys like Randy young, happy-go-lucky, hot with the burning desires of youth, eager to be fulfilled momentarily, to be thrilled for the sake of thrill only, made me a shameful foil, a plaything, to be taken and enjoyed and mercilessly forgotten.

I was always eager, too eager in fact. I wanted friends. I wanted to belong to someone, and for someone to belong to me though, at the time, my

thoughts had not dwelt on such a relationship as was mine and Randy's. I never realized such associations existed. I liked the girls at school, or thought I did, though I never seemed to get out of being with them what other boys seemed to. My taste for them was limited to beautiful faces, girls with talent, girls who confided in me, girls who came to me and talked about their relations and problems they had with other boys. Somehow I never sought girls out, as did other boys my age. They were merely there, and I accepted them, as a matter of course. I had known none of the thrills others talked about constantly. Though I was not completely ignorant, these things seemed not to interest me. I blamed this on my family's financial state. We were poor, not the poorest in the neighborhood, not like the Slatters who lived in a cabin down by Pearl River, but the family car was not available to me and I had but the barest necessity of clothes, ones that were suitable for church and school, but for nothing else. Too, I absorbed my free time in studying nature and reading from cover to cover the publications Papa selected for the store. John Fox was my favorite then and, since he was also the favorite of many of Papa's regular customers, he stocked the shelves with Fox's works. I had read *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* many times, *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* ten times over, and *The Heart of the Hills* and *In Happy Valley* at least a hundred, for they were my favorites. So life, the passions, hatred, love, despair

left me pretty much alone until that warm fall evening I climbed into Randy's roadster.

He was dressed in chocolate brown, a very fashionable coat with double flap pockets and button straps on each sleeve, and around his neck, wound recklessly, was a canary yellow silk scarf. The brown matched to perfection the dark brown of his wind tossed hair and eyes, which fairly danced when I had accepted the ride.

"Where to, Cutty boy?" he asked briskly, his eyes wandering, as I sat down beside him, my country-bred eyes admiring his shiny red car with the yellow spokes, the sparkling headlights, and the shiny black upholstery.

"You asked me," I answered, giving him a quick, but untrained eye. "So you must of had something in mind."

"That's right, I have," he said, clicking his teeth. He tossed me a pound box of Princess Irene candy from his papa's drug store in Brandon.

I looked at them a little puzzled, then at him.

"Aren't these for your girl?"

"You're my girl, Cutty boy," he answered readily, not looking at me, his attention drawn sharply by his turning of the roadster in the dark gravel drive and onto the main road.

"Yes . . . and I'm Natacha Rambova," I said, grinning, thinking he was but making a joke.

"You laugh *now*," he informed me, shaking a finger in my face, a mocking grin on his face. "But you won't laugh for long."

We drove through the autumn twilight, mostly in silence, through avenues of scarlet trees tinged with yellow and brown, and amid patches of dark, dismal green where growths of pine refused to change for the winter that was coming on, for I could feel it in the wind. In the clear sky with Venus like a lone diamond in the West, and the robin's egg blue where honking geese sailed over us in V formation, and the sharp odor of woodfires and hickory smoke, and shocked corn left in the fields, and the stuffy smell of cotton abandoned to the naked stalks, and the hay, damp and still green, piled in cut over pasture land, and the mellow fragrance of crab apple and persimmon and possum grapes, and wine scented muscadines, and damp earth and leaf mold I could feel winter.

It was all here as we rode up and down the red hills, the constant grinding of the motor instilling in me a contentment all its own, the long shadows flitting over us, and I felt rich and grand, proud that I was alive, with this fine boy beside me, his gloved hands gripping the wheel as he sped us over the earth to what, I imagined, a promised heaven.

"Where do you want to go?" he asked for a second time, and I answered without pause.

"Anywhere, Randy, I don't care," and I didn't. Not at the moment. I wanted to go on and on, go on forever. I had worked all day in the store, it being Saturday, had scrubbed the dirty plank floors where customers had recklessly tracked in mud, had taken down most of the merchandise, dusted

each article off and rearranged things, and I was bone tired, my legs aching from having to stand all day, my clothes wet with sweat, now cold to my naked skin as the wind swept past us, and riding beside Randy was giving me a lift of the spirits, as though I belonged, was wanted. I never bothered my brain to ask myself *why* he had chosen me, for I was too glad at the moment to pursue an abstraction. I just wanted to be free, to go wherever he took me, and he seemed to feel it, for turning his dark eyes to mine he said pleasantly:

"Sure glad you decided to come with me tonight, Cutty."

"I'm glad too," I muttered, not giving the situation a second thought. How was I to know that the threads which were to embroider the gaudy tapestry of my life were already placed in the loom, the pattern set?

"I didn't think you would ever decide to come with me," he remarked, his eyes on the red, rutted road. "Been begging you long enough."

I felt triumphant. Every boy and girl at school clamored to be with him on his merry outings, not only because he was good looking, wore the best clothes in the county, always had spending money, but because his papa was the wealthiest man in Rankin. They owned a drug store, a livery stable, a ladies' ready-to-wear, and the only barber shop within thirty miles. Too, they were constantly giving parties and picnics out on their spacious lawn with statues of deer and swans in every flower bed

and beneath every tree, and knew practically every one in Jackson, the state capitol, who was worth knowing.

"I—I don't go much," I explained, in truth. "Have to tend to Papa's store, you know, and a hundred other things around the house. I'm not like you, Randy, I have to work."

"But it agrees with you," he prattled, giving a pleasant smile. "I've noticed you in the store, how popular you are, everybody teasing you, making over you, like there was something between you and everybody who shops at your Papa's place."

"Me . . . popular?" I cried, laughing a little shyly. "And there is nothing between me and anybody. I'm just friendly, that's all."

"Not even you and Tony Monroe, or Caslon Weber?"

I glared at him, completely baffled.

"We're just friends, Randy!"

"I bet Caslon doesn't think you're just friends."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh," he shrugged, "intuition, I guess. I just watch you, and I put two and two together."

"And you think the answer is four?"

He laughed. And I noticed how his eyes danced.

"You're not dumb after all, are you Cutty?"

"Maybe not," I said seriously, and added. "Since we are talking riddles and going in circles, just why do you like me?"

"Because I like you, Cutty," he answered, and his words went over his tongue like silk. "You're

not like other boys, boys in our same class. Not like Tony and Norman and Julian and Dutch. You're special . . . like taffy candy at the fair. I . . . I cannot exactly put my finger on why I like you. Who can? It's just . . . it's just that I get fed up with people my folks want me to like, people who to me are dull, jaded. You're fresh and clean and good, Cutty, unspoiled. And you're a good looking boy, someone I'm proud to be seen with."

I am elated.

"You don't know me, not really, Randy. Oh, at school, yes, but that's not knowing me."

He turned and looked at me, squarely in the eyes, and his face was a strange mask, a face I had never seen before.

"Can I get to know you tonight, Cutty?"

I paused, unable to speak. I could not follow his interest, for they were alien and strange to me, and suddenly I felt that I did not know him at all, that he was a complete stranger seated beside me in the wabbling roadster.

"You want us to be friends?" was all I could mutter.

He shifted in his seat, and I noticed him grip the steering wheel with a tighter grip. We were coming to a hill, and, with a jerky motion of his right hand, he changed gears as we ground up the incline, then over the top.

"More than just friends," he finally answered, as the car straightened out. "Special friends, Cutty. Very special!"

I was still puzzled.

"There is only one way two boys can be friends," I tried to explain, groping for proper words, "Just be friends."

"No, Cutty, there are other ways," he said very slowly, his voice purposely low. "Other wonderful ways. It makes all other friendships look like doddering grandpas at an old mens' home."

We drove for awhile in silence, the only sounds that of the shining roadster as it went in and out of gullies, splashing through puddles, the yellow spokes and shiny wheels now plastered with mud. It was almost dark now, the sky no longer the clean blue of a robin's egg, but slightly indigo, and the red earth no longer the vermillion but plain drab earth, the pale color of mud. The dark trees on each side of the road, their limbs forming a tunnel, shut us in complete blackness as we went through, then out again to rolling fields, and a house now and then, their windows lit from oil lamps within, the lanes dotted with cows going up to barns to milking and supper, and now and then a horse neighed, answering some mating challenge. Near the rail fences sheep grazed longingly, their woolly backs like that of the golden fleece I had read about, and tiny lambs romped and played, straying a daring distance from their protective mother's.

The smell of sugar cane cooking into syrup in some far away cane mill, assailed my nostrils, mingled with winter clover, and my feeling of importance grew with each somber mile, as I listened to

this proud boy talk, and rode with the assurance of a king.

"Have you decided where you would like to go?" he asked, his face shining out of the darkness, lit by the kerosene lanterns in front of the windshield. Then added nervously, for his voice gave out a harsh tremble: "Or, would you just like to ride and talk?"

"There is a show on at the Hart I would like to see," I braved to mention, hopeful of seeing it after reading a summary of it in a publication of the Silver Screen. "Would you?"

He was silent for a moment.

"What is playing?"

"Blood And Sand," I said, ready with a reply.

He coughed.

"I've . . . I've already seen that," he answered flatly. Then with grace. "Hope you don't mind?"

It was my time to shrug.

"Oh, I wouldn't mind seeing it twice," he apologized. "But the crowds on week-ends. You know how they are. Every love sick girl at high school will be there swooning over Valentino."

I allowed that he was right.

"Besides, I'd rather be out here with you," he said, a-tremble. He laid a hand on my thigh, gripped it firmly, then placed it back on the steering wheel.

This gesture did not register, for it was a common thing for boys to touch one another, to wrestle, to wallow over each other in play and games. I

was profoundly innocent, and the innocent detect no evil.

"You didn't mind?" he asked, skittishly.

I shook my head. I had forgotten it the moment it was over.

This seemed to spur him with added interest and quick zeal. He began to talk more freely, spoke of his vacation in Biloxi, the "interesting" people he had met, a singer, a dancer, a girl who could impersonate Nita Naldi to a "T", and a bit actress from Paramount studios, who had played in De Mille's King of Kings. Coming to a narrow lane which led to Rankin Lake, he slowed to a stop.

"Suppose we ride over and park near the water," he suggested, pointing with a gloved hand, his boyish features peering out of the half-darkness. "We'll sit and talk, and eat that candy, and there are pop drinks in the rumble seat, and we'll build a fire maybe, and just sit and be to ourselves ... what you say?"

I agreed. I loved fires, the night, the lapping of water along mud banks, and the sounds of the woods after dark.

He drove down the lane and parked beneath the heavy shadows of an oak, the roadster facing the water of the lake. The moon was up, a round white lantern in the sky, and it released its light on to the rippling water, flooded it, like a light on a mirror, and the trees around and the shady bank could be seen, shining eerily up at us. He cut off the motor. Silence fell around us. We sat for a moment not

speaking, just drinking in the night, the stealthy woods, listened to the cracking of dead limbs, the chant of a frog, the rustle of old dry leaves as a breeze stirred them up, the movement of little animals.

"How do you like it?" he asked in a whisper, which was like a startled scream.

"I love it," I answered, swallowing hard. "I've always loved the woods, especially at night, the sounds, the comfort of being by myself."

"I love it too," he added. "But I never get a chance to get out, to be by myself, to enjoy nature like I like to enjoy nature. These modern times, this rapid pace, I detest, don't you?"

"I wasn't meant for them," I answered quietly.

"See . . . we're both alike, Cutty, you and me." And he seemed proud of this, our similarity. "I wasn't meant for those things either. I never was. I never will be. I think deep thoughts, Cutty, serious thoughts. I wonder about things. I wonder about people. I dream about people I would like to know, but I never get to meet that kind of people, actually. I guess they don't exist . . . just in my mind somewhere."

"What kind of people?" I asked, deeply curious. He sounded like me.

"Well . . . they're not like the boys I know at school, or like any of the girls, Sheila, or Thelma, or Delta, any of those. It's just, I guess . . . I guess it's just wanting, longing to be close to someone, but no one wants to be close, not boys anyway. And you

never know how you stand with them. You can't depend on them. Just when you think you have discovered a friend, someone who really cares, they go cold on you, and they are like strangers again. Do you have a friend, Cutty, a real friend I mean?"

"Well, Caslon and I are friends," I try to explain. "What I mean, we both like the same things, books we both read and exchange, shows we see, things we like to talk about. We get on well together. Once in a while I go to his house for a week-end, and he comes to mine. We hunt sometimes, fish, or just walk through the woods."

"What do you do . . . er, in the woods?"

"Oh, just walk and talk, identify birds . . . sometimes in summer go swimming."

"Naked?"

"Yes."

"Does Caslon have a nice body—well built I mean?"

"I've never noticed," I lied, my memory swiftly conjuring a picture of Caslon diving from a rock into the water. He was blond, and his smooth complexion matched his hair, skin almost like satin.

"I had a friend once," he said, staring through the windshield at the moonlit water, his profile dimly lit. "I use to spend the night at his house sometimes. He use to put his arms around me in his sleep. But I didn't mind somehow . . . do you think that strange?"

"I do not think it is strange at all," I answered. "If he did it in his sleep. How could he know?"

"But ... suppose he wasn't asleep, and did it what would you think then?"

"Its nothing to that," I said, and truthfully. "some people are more affectionate than others. Maybe he liked you a great deal, perhaps more than you liked him."

"Oh, I don't think so," he whispered, his voice low, plaintive. "I really liked Finley. Too much maybe. I thought of him all the time. I never knew a moment when I did not think of him, up until he joined the Army. I guess that is why I hate any branch of the service, because it took him away from me. It wasn't fair, somehow. He was the only friend I ever had who only partially came up to my expectations of a friend. He was warm, Cutty, a lovable guy."

"You miss him then?"

"At first, but I got over it. In time I tried to have other friends, but they wasn't like Finley, not a single one of them. Sometimes I wonder if he was the only one, the only one in the world who felt as I." He paused, glanced round at me, then back to the darkness. "He understood me, I think. And no one else has ever done that."

"I understand you," I assured him, shifting restlessly in my seat. The night was bringing on a chill, and my sweaty clothes were like ice next to my skin. I shivered.

"I wish you did understand," he disagreed, then noticed my shivering. Taking off his coat, he spread it around my shoulders. His arm did not leave my

back, and he pulled me warmly to him.

Embarrassed, I did not know quite what to say, but muttered:

"I forgot to bring my coat."

"I'm glad you forgot it," he whispered, his face so close to mine I could feel his mouth moving as he talked. "I want to do things for you, for I like you, Cutty, always have."

"Like you liked Finley?"

"Maybe more," he uttered, pressing me more snugly to him. "You're so small, almost like a girl, makes me want to . . . er court you, Cutty."

"Is that why you're holding me?" I asked shyly, for no one, man or woman, had ever held me like this, so protectively, and I was ill-at-ease, even though I had known Randy all my life. Presently, in this completely new situation, he seemed a stranger, and I wondered why he would want to hug a boy.

"In a way you remind me of girl," he answered, still holding me tightly, our faces lit by the pale moonlight that sifted down over us. The sound of wild geese going over brought on a melancholy reverie. A lonesome sound, and for some unknown reason I could not understand, being in his arms made sense to me, as if we belonged somehow. "You're not a sissy, no sir, but you're, oh so interesting, Cutty. That's what it is . . . interesting. Most boys are not interesting. But you're just strange enough that people want to know more about you, what makes you tick."

"Hadn't you rather hold a girl?"

"Girls! I've got my belly full of them. Always hinting for dates, just because I got a new car, and a little spending money, and . . ."

"And good looking," I finished for him. Randy was good looking, so clean, so maddeningly appealing.

He turned his face and looked at me, his warm lips just above mine.

"Do you think I'm good looking, really . . . now tell the truth?"

"You are good looking, and I am telling the truth. You're the best looking boy in class, with the exception of Gideon. Everybody knows that."

He pulled back a little, his arm around me going slack.

"You think Gideon is good looking?"

"Really, Randy. You know everybody at school thinks he's good looking. I'd be lying if I said I didn't. That black hair, those go-to-hell eyes."

"I hate him!"

"You have no cause. He hardly speaks to me. I'm out of his class."

"Out of his class is right," Randy put in, coming closer again. "You're so far above him, in every way possible. I wouldn't give the sweat off your balls for twenty like him."

I laughed at that. How strange he was, how different.

He laid a hand on my hand, then my other hand.

"You're still cold," he said, protectively. "Here,

put your left hand around back of me, and stick both hands into my pants. Isn't that better?"

I said yes. It was better. I could feel his breathing, his warm back, his hard muscled stomach rise and fall with each breath. He seemed not to be wearing any under clothing, and my fingers lay in a patch of hair. It was thrilling somehow, a feeling the likes of which I had never experienced, and I allowed my hands to remain there. It made us feel so close somehow, so intimate, and I had never felt intimate with anyone in my whole life.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, after a void of silence.

"Nothing," I lied, thinking of his fine body near mine. "Why?"

"You're trembling."

"I don't know why," I stammered, pretending indifferent. "I'm warm enough."

"From something else, Cutty. Like me, you're trembling from something else."

What he said was true. I was trembling, and from something else. My own fear. I was deeply frightened. But something held me to him, some magnetic living force I couldn't understand nor name. My head reeled, and every vein in my body ran with a full pulse, like a struggling heart. How odd that a patch of hair could do all that, but it was not just the patch of hair on the groin of this good looking boy, but with it the imagination, the inner vision that something else lay there in that dark nest. Once I had seen a stud mount a mare,

his enormous organ pulsating like an individual body all its own, and I had gone weak at the knees. I felt this same way now. Something turbulent, something stronger than I could ever be, lay at bay, waiting for me, and I envisioned it. I knew what it would be like, an instinctive sense within my nature, for I knew Randy. I knew his build, knew how strong and huge his thighs were, his calves, how broad his chest, how hard and cruel were his arms. Thereby I imagined the rest.

"Put your hand down further, Cutty," he said, pressing against me, his shoulder so hard against mine I ached. "Please,"

Hot blood rushed through my every vein.

"I can't, Randy," I cried hoarsely, my tongue as dry as a powder house. "I can't do anything like that."

"You can, Cutty, you can. I want you to. Please!"

"Is this how you want us to be friends?" I asked, catching my breath. My whole body shook. An owl hooted, which added to my fright. I pulled my fingers up, making hard fists of my hands.

"Something wrong in being friends like this?" he asked sharply, and I imagined I could see his eyes snap in the darkness. "It's the best way to be friends, especially for you and me. We could get on good together, Cutty. We'd sure make a pair."

"I've never done anything like . . ."

"What!" he half-shouted, raising up. "With all those other boys patting you on the ass . . . Nor-

man, Julian, Dutchy, and you not giving them a thrill?"

"Honest," I answered. "So help me God, Randy. I haven't. I've never laid a hand on anybody, girl or . . . or . . . boy."

I was truly frightened now. The dawn of my ignorance was breaking into life. Mama, in her nightly reading from the Bible, had hinted of something similar in the Old Testament. Sodom and turning to a pillar of salt, and destruction! She had made it all sound like hell fire and brimstone!

In that instant I saw something awesome about Randy. His face shining into mine, lit by the dull light of the moon, looked hideous, strange, his dark eyes stabbing at me through the darkness, and I wanted to scream. I didn't want to go to hell! Yet, at the same time he was so fascinating, drawing me into his dark cave of sin, his haunting pleading voice shattering to fragments my most precious reserves.

"Please, please, Cutty, put your hand on it, play with it—please!"

"I can't, Randy, I can't," I stammered, withdrawing my hands from that warm mansion of his body into the cold.

"Don't you like me, Cutty?" he teased. "Don't you like me . . . as much as you like other boys?"

"I like you more," I answered, folding my hands to my heart. "But not like this. Other boys do not want this."

"That's what makes us different, Cutty, you and

me. We could be so close ... such good, such wonderful friends."

"We can still be friends," I said, meaningfully. "Without this."

He drew back.

"Then ... you're like the rest. You don't want to be friends."

"But I do," I cried, thinking of all my loneliness. "I need ..." I started to say ... I need you ... which I did. I needed someone. But I caught myself in time.

"I need you too, Cutty," he went on, weakening my reserves, drawing me down into his ways by invisible ropes, calling me with his fatal siren song, his power, his magic voice. "We both need each other. We're unique. Don't think I have not known for a long time how lonely you are, have known all along. I've watched you at that store, giving the boys the eye, and not knowing why you were doing it, advertising yourself in front of them, tantalizing them to do something to you, refusing them when they ask you to go places, but still wanting to go. Oh, Cutty, I've seen that haunted look in your eyes ... many times. I've seen them go hot with longing, and knew what you were wanting. Why do you think I kept asking you to walk home with me, or ride home with me every Saturday night?"

"I didn't think you asked so that we could do this," I answered, trying to be factual and practical. "It is sinful to ... to want another's body."

"So ... we'll both go to hell! But first let us

enjoy ourselves."

My mind, suddenly, was a delirious runaway upon the prairie of my emotions. I was torn by good and evil, revulsion and desire, thrill and meaning. I wanted to take, to be taken, by someone . . . someone who would make me feel as if I belonged. But Randy—I had never thought of this person, this male, in relation to my wants. I knew certain untold sensations went over me when I looked at handsome boys, that when they sat with their feet in the air, their tight pants drawing around their under thighs, that when they bent over, and sometimes wrassled with one another, I was dazzled by them, hungry for something with them I could not understand. I wanted to be close, without appearing ridiculous.

I trembled, both from a kind of deserted fear, which was slipping away now, listening to Randy's desperate voice, and the unknown sensation I might chance to feel through such an experience with this boy. Too, I had no inkling what he wanted us to do, or what he expected of me. And out of all this fear and trembling, this probing, I wanted desperately to mean something to this boy, to belong, even if it meant . . . no . . . that was unthinkable. He was so huge, his body so powerful, his mind so utterly persuasive, almost demanding, and that terrified me too.

In the stricken silence of my thinking, my mind clutching certain glimpses here and there, battling my emotions, he bent over me. His face was close to

mine, his strong arms around me, locking me to his chest, the clean odor of olive oil and brilliantine assailing my senses, raiding my mind, and, before I realized what he was doing his lips were on mine, warm at first, only luke warm, like a close breath more or less, then hot. I could see their softness in my mind, as I had seen them many times during my past, whenever he talked to me, when he laughed, and I knew, even in complete darkness, how utterly beautiful they were—soft as a babies, yet firm, drawing out my strength, making my tiny body go limp.

A moment more and we were groping for each others clothes. I could feel his huge warm hands on my body, slipping down my shirt, at my pants buckle, and I knew he was feeling mine. Then we were both naked, even in this dark wintry chill, with the moonlight playing over our flesh like a stolen light, and I was laying down, under the strength of his hands, was being turned over on my stomach and, in the deep maw of my fears, my trembling, my anticipation, I felt his huge warm body over mine, felt the coarse hair at his groin along my buttocks, felt his massive thighs, brisk with hair, rough, chafing the underside of my legs, felt a sharp, lightning-like pain, like a stabbing hot iron, as he entered me, all the way at one deliberate thrust, and I knew then what he wanted with me, knew what thrilled him to the roots of his being, but I could not stray from the sharp pain in which he gloried, could not rise, could not move except to

assist him in his savage rape. He was taking me, as a man might take a woman, and with that same equal ease. His huge organ, like a battering ram, went up and down with the regularity, the flexibility of a piston in hot oil. The leatherette seats, with their weak coiled springs, squeaked maddeningly with his every downward thrust, adding greatly to my hapless pain, and his hard arms coiled up around my neck, his teeth gnawing at my shoulders, sharp and painful, swept me into some kind of unimagined oblivion.

Never had I endured such pain, like lightning burning up my spine to my heart, not never had I enjoyed it, except under the wrath of his hard, suddenly primitive body, tensing over mine. His passion, unleashed, recklessly unspent, was testing my endurance, pang upon pang. We were met, and joined, savagely joined, as all carnal creatures who, through their misguided, uninterpreted passion, must seek and find the instrument best suited for themselves, shaping, moulding, taking each other's form, the internal taking the form of the external, the external seeking out the shape of the internal, until both passions are exhausted, spent. One, the more powerful, the more dominant, wounding the other, the weak, the submissive. The powerful gaining climax of passion through love of his power, the weak fulfilling the climax of his weakness through his love of being meek. Randy gained satisfaction through giving pain, as I gained it by receiving it, each in pursuit of the happiness for the other, both

bodies joining, coupling to accomplish unity. And as he wounded me with his awesome play, his savage rape, the little boy turned seducer, the world around us, in that endless canopy of darkness, joining in as a part of nature, began to inflict their own terrible scourging. There was a lifting of a breeze, and two pine cones, close to one another, wounded one another each time they swayed. The willows, bending over the water, caught up in the sudden wind, and limber with coming death, leaned low and cut the water with long naked whips. And ginseng, in wild bunches, like hardened grapes, rattled and beat against the trunks of trees, skinning back the bark, Witch Hazel scourged the lilies, like old women with hateful brooms. Buckeyes, in clusters, dark and hard as nuts, slapped the limbs in the wind, like Randy's warm nuts between my lower thighs, and in the tops of the Ginger Bread trees, a gale was reaping the leaves like corn. And Randy now, inflicting all his hidden strength, sank into my flesh, a huge thorn in the bud of a rose, and the passion of his youth, his male potential, like lava exploding in a chasm, poured and gushed through my every nerve. Then his body melted over mine, like candle wax, his thighs grew limp, and lovingly, thrustingly, he caressed my neck and chest, drew me up to him, his face wet with tears, and kissed me soundly on the lips, soft, liquid kisses, giving nectar, not taking now, and whispering, soft pleasurable whispering, which eased all my burning pain:

"Cutty, you were wonderful. I love you. I love you. Be mine . . . always be mine." And I was nodding, saying "yes, yes, yes," in return to his pleas, knowing what pain I would have to give in order to give at all, and loving that pain, because it was Randy's pain. He all but swallowed me then, his moist, mouth sliding over my face, my eyes, my lips, my hair, his hands cupping my face, his hot, pulsating body, wiry with pricking hair, thighs whose unbelievable strength groping for a position both can enjoy, joining my limbs, as if we were suddenly grown together, our bodies fitting into place, as if by the hand of nature, that fits in others muscle to bone, limbs to torso, organ to organ, the cruelty of one shifting to fit with the other.

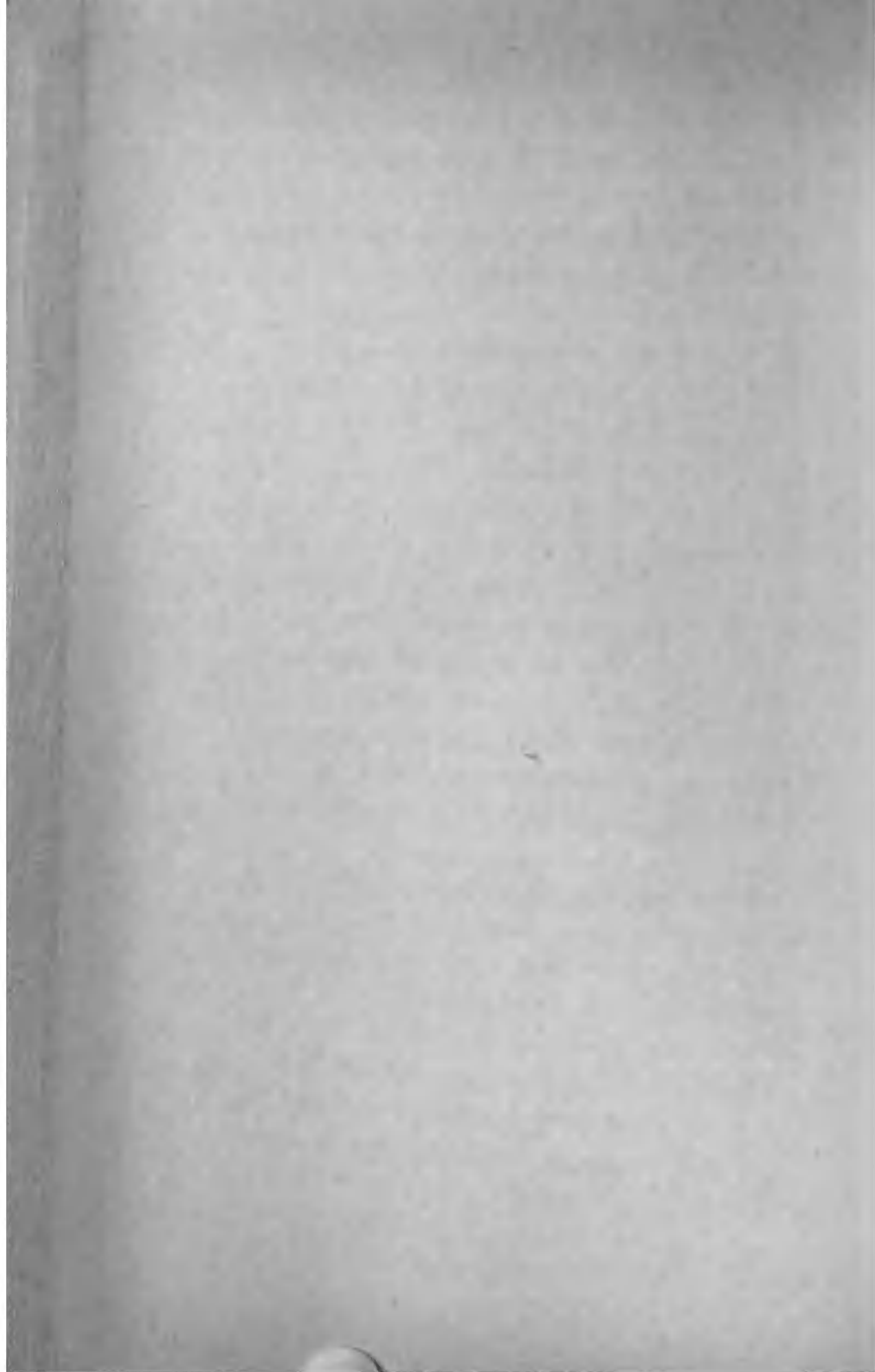
So I lay again beneath him, this time on my back, entwined by his stout, sinewy arms and legs, weighted by his heaving breath, and filled with a new trembling, a new fright . . . the terror of ecstasy.

I was his. He was mine, all in one moment of molten hot pain. Anguish and terror and madness and anarchy, at its best and worst, contributing to our carnal lust. We were youth. And we were hard, and for that hardness, passion was all the more demanding, all the more ultimately fulfilled. With his desperate strength he had split the veil of my innocence, a gory gash of pain, laboring to bring love and to take love, body locking with body to wring out ecstasy.

Finally, as the wind drove fiercely, popping the

canvas top to his roadster, whipping the dead leaves like ingots in a caldron, we pulled ourselves free and dressed.

It was then that I noticed that we had squashed my box of Princess Irene candy.



CHAPTER TWO

Randy opened up a new world for me, or, he revealed my true self to myself. After that carnal night with him, in which I admittedly gloried, even the ghastly pain, I began to notice the boys in school more. One day they were as nothing to me, then the next they were objects of fascination. And each a different fascination. I wondered why I had not seen this about them before. I began to notice, not so much the way they stood, the way their clothes fit, the way they sat, crouched, reclined, but their crotch, how each individually bulged, each in a different way, and my imagination pictured them without their clothes, in the position Randy took that rapturous night.

Now their teasing, their little jokes, their pranks took on a new meaning for me. They were actually courting me, as Randy had courted me, and I did not have the sense to understand that from the beginning. Before, I thought they paid me more attention, centering their interests on me, because I was small. Now, I realized it was for another reason, and my liking and admiration doubled.

Now, when they gazed at me with their hot eyes when they teased, laughed, jockeyed to sit next to me, fondled me . . . in a fashion . . . I knew, or

thought, they desired sex with me, as Randy had desired it.

This lent a new importance to my otherwise drab existence, being wanted, being sought after, harboring secretly the fact that they wanted to make love to me, to take me as Randy had taken me. Now, I was the center of the wheel, the hub, the nucleus around which they whirled. How foolish I had been before not to have sensed their attraction, and what it was about me which attracted them.

Now, for the first time, I understood why they gathered around papa's store on Saturdays, why they lingered in the late afternoon, waiting for me to close . . . they wanted to be with me, take me out, have me sexually.

A cheap thrill, with no obligations attached, no previous preparations, nothing to declare but their bodies.

And how reckless they seemed to me now . . . now that I knew what was behind their cunning, their bland maneuvers.

How maddening now were their drowsy eyes now when they looked at me, how tell-tale their glances, for I knew what lay beneath them. How silky their fiery voices, primed with passion, when they talked, kidded, courted, how languid their bodies, as they leaned up against the store front laughing and talking, their long legs spread, their expressions devilish, coquettish, rash, incautious; waiting like a cat at a mouse hole. How tantalizing, how reckless, when I knew that beneath that recklessness desire

lurked, to the boiling point, ready to explode at any moment, ready to erupt in an outpouring of passion.

No girl was ever feted with such attention as I was in that little country store, with these rough, robust country boys bidding for my hand, waiting impatiently for their cue, timid in the waiting, shy, boyish, desiring me desperately, yet afraid to approach me with such an odd request. Perhaps they were waiting for me to make the move.

But how ignorant I was then . . . before Randy.

The school I attended sat in a clearing of about two acres, with sycamores and pines forming, what appeared, to be a boundary, or border, joining with a hay field on one side and the Court House and Church on the other. From the first grade to the twelfth was housed in this one building, built of red brick, two-storied, with a black tile roof. The ground around was bare, from so many scuffing feet, and black, from the coal ash which had drifted from the huge pile at one corner of the building. Drinking water was supplied by an elevated rain water tank in the rear of the school, with six faucets rising up about four feet above a concrete slab. Our toilets and showers were located at the extreme end of the clearing, gained by a well-worn trail. A wall ran completely around the boys toilet, forming a bull pen where the older boys gathered to smoke, but daringly, for smoking or chewing tobacco was against the school's rules. The urinal was a long, V-shaped trough down one length of this wall,

and the stools were inside the toilet, one long row, built up of concrete with square wooden seats which opened back on leather hinges. The place smelled of urine, mud, rain water, tobacco, sweat and manure. Nevertheless, this was the gathering place of the older high school boys during recess and lunch hour, and in that length of time many peters were exposed, some longingly, some at greater lengths than it required to urinate, and many becoming half-erected, due to a single audience, or from a stare. It was not an uncommon thing among country people, farm people, especially during the twenties, for school boys to expose themselves to their buddies in many ways, in the showers, at sports, at their toilet, swimming naked in some wooded creek, stripping to play in haystacks, and even horse back riding. I never paid any attention to these outward displays of nudity until my affair with Randy. Afterwards, my eyes sought them out, my senses maddeningly affected, even when a boy unbuttoned his pants, even before I saw what lay inside, then when he reeled out his organ to relieve himself. To arrest a boy who looked appealing, to delay him as long as possible at the trough, I would strike up a conversation, a test maybe, a certain field game, girls (this subject always delayed them) and all the while cutting my eyes sharply to take note of what he had. To better take an inventory, I would go into the toilet when it was full, usually around lunch hour. I would stand at the far end, paper in my hand, and pre-

used to wait my turn. No one dared sit directly on a toilet seat, even during those unsanitary, primitive times. The boys would squat, with one foot on one side of the hole and one foot on the other. This way their behind was exposed, their thighs being cocked up, and their organs and testicles hanging limp, open for my inspection. No boy at school then were lacking in potentials, usually much more than they needed for future breeding purposes, and they liked to show off what they had in front of other boys, like strutting bantam cocks in a barn-yard. I think every boy, to an extent, is an exhibitionist. Country life is simple, continuous century after century without change. There is little, if any, opportunity for a boy to draw attention to himself, without purposely exposing himself in some obvious manner. Too, country people believe that might is right, and the healthier you are, the bigger in stature, the more you are admired among your fellows, and the more you are a likelihood for success. I have seen country boys, when out in the open, in the field working, or on a hunting jaunt, take out their tool and take a leak without turning their back on their companions, and stand there shaking it long after they are through, shaking it much more than is necessary, and stripping it back . . . lovingly.

This is male boast to the extreme, and is instinctively practiced among country-bred and country-reared youth, who must feel they are all male, and must advertise this maleness in the presence of an

outsider.

I was not an outsider. They had known me all their lives. We had grown up together. Therefore, since Randy introduced me to this kind of strange admiration, the field was open. Hardly a day passed that some other rural boy did not expose himself freely; his organ I studied minutely. The more you looked the more he knew he was admired, envied. So it was there for you to see, and touch, if you had the guts to try it.

I was not shy in front of boys I grew up with, but I was reserved, to a fault, so, to play it safe, I stuck with Randy. I gave myself to him whenever he wanted me, which was often. Too often, I think.

After that first night, I was so ashamed of what I had done I could hardly face Mama and Papa at the breakfast table. Mama would have dropped dead had she learned that I had sinned of the flesh, even if I had sinned with a girl. And Papa would have either killed me with his squirrel rifle or else run me away from home.

That next day my rectum and spine ached and throbbed so I could barely walk, without calling attention to myself and, though every prick of knife-sharp pain only recalled to me the ecstasy of the night before, of Randy making wild love to me, I was careful to carry on as normal as before. It was a great price to pay for one night's thrill, even in the sinning, and how I had sinned, not with a woman, a girl, not even with a whore, but with a male, being taken as a woman. This bothered me a

great deal, for I had been born and reared in a family who were real men, and who would have rather died than lower the standards they held so dear. Strong, willful, determined men who adored their women, protected them, loved them, filled them with children, men who could never be less; they were the epitome of everything I admired in a man . . . which now I desired . . . and as a woman would desire a man . . . as my own mother would desire a man, as my aunts, my cousins, and a deep guilt hung over me, and I brooded.

Yet, love is stronger than loyalty, and desire is stronger than death. I wanted to be a man in every way, a credit to my father, all my kin, the men I would meet and know and work with in the future. But I could not. I could not be a real he-man and yet desire men sexually, to want them as I wanted Randy, as he had wanted me. I had been tapped by one male, realizing the ecstasy of it, and so I would never be completely satisfied by any, clamorous to hop from one to another in affair after affair, giving them what they wanted, in order to give to myself.

Not that I was ruinous. I had a clear head on my shoulders. I was not cheap. I was no longer lonely, for I had Randy now, his body, his heart, but I was still yet so young, the sap in my lithe body molten hot, my eager mind racing to partake of life to the hilt, to grasp, to feel, to satisfy this new, desperate urge, to calm my own frantic beating heart in the arms of some boy, coarse, carnal, whatever, so long as he wanted me.

There is a fanatical ecstasy in this. To have what you want, but want still. To cast aside loyalty so carelessly, abandoning your former ways so that your wild hunger can feed in new pastures, so that you can calm your curiosity by your hold on those who are curious about you. Too, because this desire is a forbidden thing, a bitter fruit from a treacherous tree, your cravings are doublefold. These meetings in dark alleyways, in the back seats of cars, trysts in some dark wood, in some abandoned house, as Randy and I met, anywhere that it is safe for one moment, this secrecy adds thrill to thrill. It also enshrouds the normal practices with a common drabness, killing such a desire, should such a desire come.

That my life had changed was certain and, it seemed to me overnight. There was no slow, gradual change, like evolution. One day I was one thing, the next I had become another. Or (I wondered many times) had I been born like this; that Randy, with his appealing persuasion, brought the fact to my realization. Had he merely unlocked Pandora's box, and let loose what was already there?

I could not answer my question, especially then, when I was so young, so basically immature mentally, when I was so callow, such a gullible novice.

Nevertheless, in those times which followed that wonderous night, I kept my desires, nursed them, cultivated them with my imagination, fed on them with my hungry eyes whenever I looked at a good-

looking boy, but in deep secret. Though it worried me, kept me in a preoccupied solitude, for I dared confide in no one, I could not fight permanently what my own body craved, no more than I could fight hunger or lack of sleep or rest. This was an appetite, almost a drug which I had to have, however cool my reasoning, however obstinate my verdict.

I kept to the store as much as I could, mainly to be beyond the eyes of Mama and Papa, and took up the hobby of painting stones as a means to divert my ravished mind from visions of the naked male. These little stones, found in abundance along creek beds and cliffs, were used as paper weights, or colorful knick-knacks to go on living room what-nots. I was good with a paint brush, sketched a little, and I painted miniature scenes on them, usually ante-bellum homes, picnic scenes, girls in hoop skirts, and sometimes birds and fishes. For boys who bought them I painted fishing and hunting scenes, or the face of a pretty girl, sometimes a horse, and mostly Tin Lizzies, which they loved.

I fixed up one of the front windows of the store to display them, and was surprised the attention paid them by the local boys, and how many they bought. Every spare hour was spent locating new oddly shaped stones along the sand bars of Pearl River, and painting them I also set up a lottery board inside the store, which drew the boys like flies. Thirty cents was as high as the board went, and usually every peg they pulled out of the board

brought gifts or merchandise in the store. Papa praised me for my knack for drawing customers, even if most of them were kids, and the nickels and dimes they spent throughout each Saturday added up.

Later that fall, as corn was being harvested, Papa built an addition to the rear of the store and set up a grist mill for grinding corn into meal. This added another attraction, for most of the farmers had to take their corn thirty miles into Jackson, and usually every Saturday, from sunup to sunset, the rear of the store was crowded with both whites and blacks, riding horses and wagons; and cars and trucks parked under the huge oaks and the yard, ringing with male laughter. Horse shoe games were set up, to while away their time as they waited for their corn to be ground, and I furnished dominos and checkers and cards. The grist mill really paid off, for many of the farm boys, and most of the negroes, bought things to eat out of the store, stage planks, moon pies, rock candy, bubble gum, pop drinks, sardines and crackers, plaited tobacco, Bull Durham, Bull of the Woods chewing tobacco, and orange or grape juice.

During that fall, Randy and I continued to have our little secret get-to-gethers, in the barn loft, on the cotton in the cotton crib, in his roadster on the lake, anywhere we could find a safe place. It seemed the boys paid me more attention, or I thought they did. I was full of pep then, happy in a way with Randy, and this showed I suppose, and

they were always flirting with me, or asking me to go somewhere with them. They were affecting me more and more with their obvious maleness. The more I was with Randy the more I became aware of other boys, their looks, their actions, the way they fondled and sought me out . . . especially the way they regarded me in relation to other boys my age. At times on Saturdays I could hardly do my work properly due to the bubbling activity around the store. Amid the crowds, someone was constantly rubbing their crotch against me, or ass to ass rubbing, or a million and one little personal contacts which kept me in a positive state of ecstasy, and by night fall I was so raring to go that Randy thought me the sexiest thing in the world.

There was one boy named Clan Oakleigh who greatly affected me. He was country to his finger tips, living in a log cabin back beyond the railroad depot, along with a brood of sisters and brothers and a gnarled, tangle-haired mother and bearded father who tried to make a living out of a few sparse acres of corn and a truck garden. But Clan, himself, was the picture of health. He was tall, but of good proportions, broad of shoulders, huge of flank, and walked straight and proud, not like most of the rural, backwoods farmers who walked a little stooped, their body a little forward of their legs. His hair was long, of corn silk brown, curling down over his muscadine black eyes, and came to a point at the nape of his neck, but it was brushed until it shone, and he always went clean shaven, a habit

many farm boys did not practice. He always wore jeans two sizes too small, or hand-me-downs from his father, a brakeman's jacket, and high topped brogans, and I am certain no undergarment, for you could see the definite shape of his organ between his legs, which drove me to distraction.

Unlike his rural counterparts, Clan was good-mannered, quiet-spoken, and always regarded me with the utmost respect. I knew he never had any money, so every Saturday I treated him to a coke, which brought a broad grin and a hearty "thank you." I always noticed his hands, huge, immaculately clean, his finger nails trimmed, and the huge silver ring on his right hand which he had made himself.

One Saturday evening he was the last to leave. In fact, he was helping me tidy up (he always insisted on doing something to pay for his drink). Randy was in Monterey for a track meet, so I took my time putting things away, knowing we would not be together for the weekend.

Clan busied himself stacking the corn meal in one corner of the back shed. Papa always ground the corn in exchange for a sack of corn meal which he sold. As Clan lifted one of the sacks, pulling himself up with it, his pants split from crotch to ankle.

"Laws," he cried. "Am I in a fix!"

"I'll fix that," I assured him, taking a card of safety pins out of a glass case. Going back to him I was in a tremble, and I could hardly hold the pin

card I was so affected by his maleness. He did not have on any underwear and he was completely exposed. I had never seen anyone so male!

Surprisingly, he did not appear timid, or embarrassed, and he obediently spread his legs as I stooped and began pinning his jeans back at the ankle, then worked my way up.

His leg was lithe, but hard, almost bone hard of muscle, and so covered with dark wiry hair I could hardly see the skin. His thigh was a wondrous thing to behold there, encased in the tattered jean material, the evening shadows making him all the more dark, the more attractive. When I got to his crotch I all but fainted. My hands shook. One time I stuck my fingers with the pins until they bled. His shaft and balls, as big as a mule's, fell from a nest of wiry black hair, and as I tried to pull the material around them, shaking all the while, and to overlap the material so that I could pin it together, his peter began to swell. It was impossible to pin the material now, and it thrust out through the opening, the head as big as an apple, and as red.

Still fumbling with the torn cloth, I tried to put it back through the opening and wrap the cloth around it. Impossible, my every nerve floundering, I looked up at him quickly. He was looking down at me, his hands on his hips, his dark eyes shining like an animal's in the dusk light. In fact, his eyes burned, fired with passion.

Looking up at him seemed to throw him off guard, to distract his attention from his sex

thoughts, and he blinked, like someone caught in the act of theft.

"That thing misbehaves sometimes," he said then, his voice unsteady.

Still on my knees, I said:

"It's sure a big one, Clan. Biggest I've ever seen."

Easing down his hand, he caresses it lovingly, stripping it up and down, turning it this way and that, as if for my examination.

"Ah, it'll do, Cutty boy, to piss with anyway. That's all I use it for anyway."

I could tell he was proud of what he had, not in a bragging way, but simply aware of the facts.

Still on my knees, the head within six inches of my eyes, I said:

"Bet it drives the girls wild."

"Nah," he answered, glancing at me then at it. "It ain't never had none of that. Reckon it never will, since I don't know how to act around girls much."

It is completely hard now, and thrusts out from the patch of coarse hair like a wagon tongue. There is a rich scent in the air, mingled with male sweat, and the scent raids my mind.

"It's sure big," I mutter, lost for words. My brain was swimming.

"You like it, Cutty?" He said this so low I could hardly hear him.

"It's sure big," I said again, but I longed to say: "Hell yes I like it!" but I was afraid to declare

myself, though Clan was as meek as a lamb.

"As ah say," he continued, his hand still on it. "It ain't never been in a woman. Ah keep it clean. But, it ain't the best looking thing in the world . . . kinda wicked, don't you think?"

"It's wicked alright," I answered, glaring at it hungrily. I had never been so affected in my life. He was so male, so coarse, so carnal in his innocence, his dark body, from this angle, towering over me, his male parts thrust out, dominating my world, blocking out every view but the view itself.

"It's big around alright," he said lowly. "Bout the size of a silver dollar." He measures around it with his thumb and middle finger. Then held up his hand, his fingers still touching, to show me how large was the opening. "Bet you can't reach around it, Cutty?"

Nervously, I slip my fingers around it. My thumb lacks about two inches from touching my middle finger.

He laughed softly.

I removed my hand, though I longed for it to remain.

"Kinda felt good," he said, and his voice trembled. "Never had any body to feel of it . . . sure feels good."

I remained silent. I would let him lead. I didn't want to appear too anxious. I knew now he wanted to do something sexually, but what, I was not certain. So I kept on my knees, enjoying the rapture of his huge dark body towering above me, so

close, so dangerously close, yet, so frightfully menacing.

He runs his hand up and down it once or twice.

"It's all worked up," he cried, hoarsely. "Sure wants to do something mean."

"It really is big," I said, shaking all over now. "When it's on a hard. Sure is big."

"It's clean too," he said, for a second time. "Ah always keep it clean, Cutty, when I think of you, 'specially."

I was puzzled, but glad.

"Do you think of me, Clan?"

"All the time," he answered. He pressed down on his hard peter, bringing it within an inch of my face, than moves it around my eyes, in a half circle. "Ah'd like . . . ah'd like to poke you."

"If you want me," I said, before I could think, my emotions playing tricks on my logic.

Before I knew what was happening, he was tearing off my clothes, his huge hands pulling my pants down to my ankles, and all the while fondling my behind, my inner thighs. Taking me by the nape of the neck, he bent my body over the sacks of corn, then rammed me with one sure, deliberate, accurate thrust. I almost fainted as hot pain scattered like a bolt of electricity through every tissue of my body. He then grabbed my hips with both hands and moved my body back and forth, up and down, from side to side, as he pumped thrust after thrust into me, and with the regularity of a machine. I could feel the coarse nest of hair pricking my behind,

could feel his hard thighs each time he lunged, could feel his balls as they swung under me, brushing my legs, then back again, like a pendulum on a clock.

He went wild then, savagely wild. Snaking his arms under my chest, he slid them up under my arm pits, then up over my neck, where his huge hands locked together. Then with one desperate thrust, he hunches, then pulls my body toward him, bowing me in a small knot over the sacks of corn, taking me, as certain as animal rape. Like Randy, but more fiercely so, more like a savage animal, and he lets out animal moans, almost like growls, he is crippling me with his desire, his male personality towering over mine, his will so strong, so determined, he was tearing away, like rain beating down against the frail petals of a flower, my own frail resistance. And I was letting him take me, though the pain was unbearable, surrendering to him because of my own physical lack of strength, because, in a sense, I was afraid of him now, now that I had seen his tameness flame into something wild, frenzied.

I became the instrument, the housing for his pent-up, frightful passion, locked now in his steel-like grip, my body victim to his huge, ramming organ, blending us as one body, one pulsating being of madness.

There is no existence now except his dark body, so huge, so utterly powerful, towering over mine, completely covering me and all my world, a world

suddenly of hard arms and nightmare hands gripping my flesh until I ached, of massive hairy thighs bouncing back and forth against my buttocks, and the awesome tool itself, the central instrument in this torture of male passion, sliding back and forth, almost like a live thing, a serpent whose enormous head penetrates the cave of my flesh, seeking, finding rapture in the hollow where it lodges.

Then, there is a great shuddering of Clan's loins, a tightening of his whole body, his arms wedging me in a force I cannot break, his hands tearing madly, as molten flame shoots into me, filling me with sap. Then he goes lax, his moans ebbing to whining, kittenish lamentations. And, taking me in his strong brown arms, we sink down to the floor of corn husks, and his hot lips, weltered by his own passion, find mine, and drown me into an oblivion of naked bliss.

"Been wanting to do that for a long time," he whispered hoarsely, wantingly, and he cups my face in his huge field worn hands, lovingly, kissed my nose, my eyes, my lips, my thick head of hair.

So, as with Randy, I am his.

I cannot help myself.

With this shy, timid boy turned into a ravening animal I could no more help myself than if I had been bound, and placed upon an altar for his sacrifice. He was so dominating, his savage, but simple personality so demanding, so menacing a thing through his passion turned into desperation.

And I knew then, there in his warm arms, real-

ized for the first time, that I was born for the pleasure of others, my small body the instrument of their anarchy, a beguiling instrument . . . though no fault of my own . . . that wooed them, that cajoled them into wrong doing . . . like this boy Clan, who had lusted after me, and me ignorant of that lust. Men would want me, would take me, then claim me, as Randy claimed me, as Clan was now putting his claim on me, all through no purposeful ambition or lust of my own, but because of something physical none of us could understand. They saw in me a simple satisfaction for their carnal cravings, though but momentarily, a second best perhaps, or even perhaps a first best, and being utterly male, dominating to a fault, towered over me with that raw personality I was unable to resist. Stemmed from my lonely childhood, my growing up without companions, added to my smallness of stature, my petit manner and ways, I was a perfect foil for their whims, their momentary wants.

Like Clan and the torn pants . . . a situation, his strength against my weakness, his ambition against my docile personality, his lust against my helplessness.

One forced to take, the other forced into the taken.

"Did I hurt you, Cutty?" he asked, now that passion had flown, pain and thoughts of pain disregarded by his urge to have me, and we lay warm and contented in one another's arms. He was filled with concern for me now, and my pain was forgot-

ten in knowing that he was satisfied, that I was
part of—had served his happiness.

So I lied.

"No, Clan. It didn't hurt . . . it didn't hurt."

CHAPTER THREE

During the first break of true winter in that fall of '26 an Indian made his way through the hoar frost to our store. At the time, I was building a fire in the little, iron pot-bellied stove which sat in the center of the store, and he just walked in quietly, gave a sign of greeting, and stood close to the stove to warm himself. He was freezing, I knew and probably starving, though he looked far from hunger physically.

"I am Mingo," he said to me, after he had turned by the stove several times, his hands out spread. "Looking for work, place to stay. Me work in fields, cut wood, cook, scrub floors, hunt, make pelts, weave basket, make white oak chairs."

I felt he could do all these things, for he looked capable.

Standing there in Papa's little pine-planked store, backgrounded by medal flour sacks, Aunt Jamima pancake mix, boxes of bright Rinso, mountains of Oxygen Soap, Gold Dust Twin Washing Powder, and Quaker Oatmeal boxes, he was the most striking person I had ever seen.

He was over six feet tall, I calculated, and weighed at least two hundred, tall and dark and stalwart, his head held majestically high, his huge

frame without an ounce of fat or unnecessary flesh.

He was wearing buckskins, brightly laced with red and yellow strips of leather, with a blanket over his wide shoulders. Around his neck, tied by a leather string, was a sea biscuit locket, made from a stone fossil, with the imprint of an insect embedded within. He also wore a necklace of shark's teeth (this section of Mississippi was once the ocean floor) and a bracelet of polished buckeyes (those shiny nuts every boy carries in his pockets) and a huge ring of silver and jade.

His hair was blue black, parted in the center of his forehead and down each side in two neat plaits. His face was the most un-Indian thing about him. It was not like the usual profile seen on every painting of an Indian, with the hawk nose, stern eyes, and protruding chin. His face was kind, strong I thought, but kind, and his eyes, of all things, were sky blue. Tipped with long black lashes, which gave them a startling look, and framed with heavy black brows, he was the most handsome savage . . . if he could be termed a savage . . . I had ever seen.

He told me that he was Choctaw and was from Tishomingo County, where he had lived most of his life, but had traveled since he had become of age, doing odd jobs and going wherever they had taken him.

He was clean, polite, and so majestic I felt as though I was in the presence of nobility. He seemed remarkably intelligent, which was utterly lacking in these parts, even among the whites.

We needed the help and Papa, duly impressed with him (for he had worked around Indians at Poplarville when he was a boy) hired him and let him sleep in the cotton crib (which I considered degrading) until a better place could be prepared. I would have gladly let him share my bedroom, just to be around him, but I didn't dare suggest this to Papa or Mama. And Mingo proved his worth a hundred-fold.

He took over the grist mill on Saturdays, until all the farmers had ground their corn, kept wood for the house fires and the store, milked, tended the horses, scrubbed the store and house, brought water, kept the yards swept clean, pumped gas for the cars, and during his spare time made baskets and straight chairs from split oak, which he hung in neat rows on one side of the store, on the outside wall. He was handy at doctoring the stock, and he was skilled in the use of plants and roots for certain ailments. He made cough syrup from wild cherry bark for Mama, made lotion from flag roots for colic and indigestion—which we bottled and sold in the store—he made a tonic from dog wood bark, another from snake root leaves which was good for muscular aches and he made a substance for prolonging life from ginseng roots (which I took, daily and which was far more beneficial, I think, than any of us believed). Mama was reluctant at first, but she finally was won over to him and he was constantly producing tonics for her ailments and for Papa's muscle aches and tiredness.

Mingo loved Cokes, could open the bottles with his teeth—teeth white as pearls, and he doted on jaw-breakers. Tobacco, too, he loved and I gave him a can of Prince Albert once a week for helping me in the store.

I was naturally curious about Mingo, had he ever had a squaw or children; what made him leave his people and work for a white man; but, mostly, I was curious about him, physically. He was not over twenty-four at the most, in his physical prime, shiny as a new penny, his black hair radiant, glistening with the robust good health and well-being that marks maturity. To me, he was like a young animal, a fine coated wolf or buck, his muscles toned to perfection, his stalwart manner and striking good looks keyed to his surroundings, alert as a fox, eager about all things, untiring, and I longed with a passion to see him stripped, to know what lay in that dark hollow of his groin.

He was always so calm, so assured, so independent of everyone but himself, immune to everything but his own physical aura, which made him all the more fascinating to me.

Though he was always polite, but cool, to Mama and Papa, he did show signs of warmth in my presence, and went out of the way to do me favors. There was a protective feeling about him for me, which I could sense, and in which I gloried. Whenever he and I sat on the front porch of the store, during warm sunshiny days in that fine winter, I could feel his physical presence, like you feel the

warmth of a stove. And when he lifted the axe to cut wood, bringing down both arms at a sharp angle, I gloried in watching the huge veins and muscles coordinate in fleshy coils of great untiring strength, I felt something of awe and security in his presence.

In helping me in the store, moving boxes, putting articles high up on the shelves, at times our bodies touching, fire would shoot through me, and I would cherish the memory of it for days. Or at times, he would lay a hand on my shoulder, one time he lifted me by the legs while I dusted off a top shelf, his huge arms around my upper thighs, and I day-dreamed about it for weeks afterwards. And the way he would sit on the store porch, always on a wooden keg, it leaning back against the wall, his massive thighs spread, a part of his naked leg showing from the tassels on his buckskins to his leather moccians. I always became aroused when I saw that naked portion of his leg, around his dark ankle, for there was a growth of hair as black as the hair on his head, and as coarse—unlike most Indians who are hairless on their bodies. That, plus his blue eyes, caused me to think of him as a half-breed, his father without doubt a white man. But that three inches of bare skin, of curling black hair, only advertised to me what was up the rest of his enormous thighs, at the crotch, and I longed to catch him off-guard while dressing, to see him naked, in his full glory.

As winter drove on to bitter cold, he built for

himself a little log cabin down by the river, and furnished it with home made furniture. It was beautiful to me, because Mingo lived there, because he had built it with his own hands, and it reflected my deep admiration for him, my growing affection. The floor was made of flat sandstone extracted from the sand bars along Pearl River. The cabin was only one room, with one door, and without a single window, the logs rising above the stone flooring to form a gabled roof, thick with beams and thatched with pine straw and mud and cypress shingles. There was a huge hearth, also of stone, a spit for cooking, an enormous bed attached to the wall, one chair and a table. The covering for his bed was made from skins he had trapped in the swamps, and of all assortments; possum, coon, doe calf, and fox, each stitched together and presenting a varied splotch of color, but it was as soft-looking as a cloud to me, and just to look at it spread over the crude bed, and to imagine Mingo stretched out on it made my loins shudder.

I wanted him, and I coveted him, being with him every moment I could get away from my work, and I wracked my brain trying to find ways and means of seeing him naked, without being obvious about it. On Sunday mornings I would run down to his cabin as early as possible, but no matter how early he was always up, fully dressed, a huge fire going in the hearth. And though I knew he bathed in the river, I never managed to be there at the time, usually, hauntingly, just after, seeing his damp

hair, his shiny dark skin but only after he had donned his buckskins and was sitting in front of the cabin in the sun to dry.

Though I kept up a steady tryst with Randy, and with Clan, meeting him in a pine thicket between his house and Papa's, or down on the railroad cut on a protruding stone, my thoughts, my dreams lay with Mingo, and thereby my heart's cravings, my carnal lusts.

It was the not knowing what he looked like that haunted me. With Randy and with Clan I knew, and realized their enormous potentials, and considered them about as wonderful as any boy could be, though many of the boys kept up their constant flirting, but Mingo advertised only enough of himself to arouse my consuming curiosity, and I strove for every opportunity, any opportunity, that would throw us together.

Not that I had, through Randy and through Clan, become basically carnal, truly evil, or completely converted to men. I was still all male at heart, I thought but this inner craving, this strange will, this strange ambition to please a male, to allow him to take joy in using my body, obsessed me. And in Mingo's presence, which was most of the daylight hours, seeing him, being touched by him, listening to him talk, I fed on passion.

If Mingo's hand accidentally touched mine, which which was frequent in our work, I trembled like a school girl. Once we tussled, and I became so sexually aroused I pretended to accidentally fall in a

clot of snow on the northern side of the store in order to chill my passion. Once we were seated on the front porch of the store in the sun, warming ourselves on the stage planks and, playfully, he slid from the wooden keg, clasped me in a scissors hold and, in twisting to free myself, I turned my body to find my face buried in his crotch. We were both paralyzed for a moment, then, as if reluctantly, he slipped his legs away and sat back down on the keg. I trembled like a thief, and could not look him straight in the eyes for the rest of that day. I think he was equally embarrassed, for he seemed to avoid me. Something that had touched me emotionally also had touched him, maddeningly for a moment, and only by his sober thinking in withdrawing his legs, was I spared from doing something I might later regret.

I knew Mingo was ignorant of this sort of goings on, like Randy and Clan did to me, for he was deeply primitive, and I thought that surely the Indian, if any race, considered sex as the animal, only for the purpose of procreation, and not for pleasure, and certainly not with his own sex. I could not imagine this stalwart, majestic being, doing what Randy or Clan did with me, could not imagine him putting himself in such a degrading position, for he was at all times highly reserved, calm, restrained.

Yet, the incident with the scissors hold had tapped an emotion within him, something close to sex, and I gloried in the memory of it. From then

on I attempted to be more playful with him, though he sensed the danger, and became instantly aloof, as if guarding his emotions, or failing to trust his emotions, refused to involve himself.

This was a strike in my favor, that he had sensed something. It was something, though very small, that I could build on, some hope that, eventually, I would get him in a position to try his hand. It was basically wicked of me to plot such a thing, to harbor lust for a person so fine, so wonderful as Mingo. But I craved him with a passion, and that passion instilled in me an immeasurable ambition to win him, and to have him, regardless of the consequences.

That I had a crush on Mingo was obvious. In fact, I was in love with him. I liked Randy immensely. And I did care for Clan, in a fashion. Though the smooth amours of Randy soothed me, the crude attacks of Clan's intrigued me, it was the primitive, the savage in Mingo that I really wanted. He represented the ultimate in manhood, the man of the stone age, the Tarzan out of our childhood, the all male, with the all lust, the power to crush and to satisfy, that I craved. The hero, the giant, the savage, the seducer, the dark ageless power which, stirred with the hungering visions of the mind, produces the image that sex admires. He was the man-animal, beautiful in form, primeval, a giant among his species, persuasive because he was utterly, profoundly male—as male as the male organ itself, as male as the odor of male seed.

Mingo to me was the symbol of sex, everything that sex was to me, the personification of everything about the male of which I dreamed. And he was faultless, because I had seen him only as others had seen him, fully clothed, his shroud of politeness, his gallantry forever about him, and not, as with Randy and with Clan, in the grotesque position of sex.

One warm, wintry day, when the sun was out, having melted all the snow, and the leaves and bark were dry in the woods, I went stone hunting. Christmas holidays were not far away, and all my painted stones had been purchased as gifts. I went down the back pasture lane, under the boughs of umbrella magnolias, through the thickets of possum haw holly, and to the sands of Pearl River. I noticed a lazy curl of smoke above the dark wall of pines from Mingo's chimney, but I did not disturb him. I wanted to go by his place on the way back, when it would be evening, almost dark, and chance to catch him bathing or on his bed of hides, undressed.

I carried one of his split oak baskets, it looped over one arm, and began my search for stones beyond the ginger bread trees, where loose stones, from the bed of the river, formed in colorful multitudes. When I had it half-filled, noticing that the sun was just above the trees in the west, I skirted the sand bar, kicking up the sand playfully as I walked, when I heard someone making a way through the woods. It was not a deer I reasoned,

nor any smaller animal, for no animal made that much noise, and it was not Mingo out on his frequent jaunts, for he went as noiselessly as a shadow.

It grew louder, as twigs snapped, as leaves rattled, and then someone stepped out into the clearing of sand.

It was Elbert Courtney.

The most-despised, the most-loathed boy at school. No one liked him, due to his overbearing ways, his constant cursing, his foul tongue, and he was considered a menace to every respectable girl in the county, justly because he considered every female his property. Only girls of ill-repute, like Mollie Wesley or Holly Monroe had anything to do with him, or that coarse over-blown Ora Neal, who, it was claimed, had borne him a child.

"Hi, Cutty!" he said, his sharp nasal twang sounding in the still, country air. "What yuh up to, boy?"

"Looking for stones to paint," I answered him, straightening up as he came along side me. He was carrying a squirrel rifle in one hand and two dead squirrels in the other, and he was soggy wet to his knees. His jet black hair, always long down his neck and over his ears, hung in his eyes, making him all the more rakish. His face was pecked with pimples, there was a bit of fuzz on his chin, and his black eyes, hotly on me frightened me a little. I had always been afraid of him, not that he he had ever approached me in any way other than friendliness,

but it was the uncertainty of his emotions, which could and did change minutely, that kept me uneasy in his presence. When he was in the store I had to watch him constantly, in fear he would steal (he had been jailed twice for stealing) and to keep him from picking an argument with one of the smaller farm boys. He loved arguments, and fights, which he excelled in, for he was so huge of frame, lanky but firm and animal strong, and agile as a bobcat. Most of the boys feared him, and kept out of his reach.

"That's right," he growled. "You are the little stone painter. You gonna give me one of em when you paint em?"

"I'll sell you one," I answered, shifting the basket to the other arm. "That's how I make my school money."

"Is that a fact," he said, smiling hatefully. "I thought you make it with that friend of yours—that Randy fellow."

I went crimson.

"What do you mean?" I managed to ask, though my voice trembled. He let out a hideous laugh.

"Doan get innocent with me, boy. You know what I mean. Doan Randy pay you for it . . . huh . . . now doan he?"

"Pay me for what?"

"Your dinky little ass, boy," he cried, still laughing hideously, swinging the two dead squirrels menacingly from a bloody straw rope.

"Nobody gets my ass," I declared, defending my

guilt, and all the while wondering how he knew. And I added. "Nobody except a girl."

He really laughed then, almost bending double.

"You doan even know where a girl's knees is located," he said between laughs. "Let alone put the swingle tree to her." Then he struck me over the head with the dead squirrels, which made a dull thud against my skull. "Doan you lie to me, boy. Hear me!"

I wiped my forehead, then, with silence, started up the sand toward the house. He rushed after me.

"Hold on, boy. Doan you run out on me, ah ain't through with you yet . . . you jes hold on!"

"What do you want?" I cried, with all the courage I could muster, turning to glare at him.

"Well, ah might want a heap, now you jes hold on till I'm through with you."

"I've got to go home. It's almost dark," I stammered, taking a step.

"Now jes hold on, boy," he insisted, catching hold of my hand, which I jerk away. "Ah jes want to be friendly with you for a minute, want to tell yo something."

"You could tell me nothing I would want to hear," I said then, but I was deathly afraid. I looked toward the cabin, wishing Mingo was near.

He looked me in the eyes, looked coldly.

"Ah think ah have."

I stare back at him, stare for stare. I fear what he is going to say, and I braced myself for his attack.

He chuckled.

"Ah know about you and that Randy fellow," he said, and the sound of his voice is like doom in my ears. "Ah seed him screwin' you one night, an doan say ah didn't, cause ah did. Ah seed his roadster parked, and you and him under that tree, an both of you bare ass naked and him on top of you, going to town. Ah seed every bit of it."

I swallowed hard. I had to deny everything, or be lost to the community. Information like this on the tongue of the likes of this boy and mine and Randy's reputation wouldn't be worth a plug nickel.

"One of your lies!" I ranted, holding my own. "Or one of your epileptic dreams!"

"Doan you call me crazy, boy!" he cried, towering over me. He slammed the dead squirrels against me again, making a bloody stain on my shirt sleeve. "Nor liar neither! Ah'll skin you alive, boy, jest like Ah'd skin these squirrels. Ah seed him screwing you with his hard rod, like yo wuz a girl ... yo screwin' fairy."

I had never heard that word before. I did not realize boys who did things with other boys were coined.

"What would yo give me if'n ah didn't tell?" he asked then, coming closer, so close I could smell his rancid body, his whiskey, tobacco breath.

I thought for a moment. "Nothing," I replied finally. "For its not the truth, not one word of it."

"Ah can prove it," he said gruffly. He leaned his

rifle up against a log and placed the dead squirrels on it. He caught me roughly by the hand and twisted me round to face him.

"I'm gonna show you, show you how riled up yo get when you see a man's dong." He jerked open his fly, reeled out his tool, made water, eyeing me until he was through. He skinned it back. "Look at it, boy, see a real he-man hard. Gets yo don't it! Look, boy, look!"

There was no alternative but to look. If I refused to look, then he would think the truth. I glared steadily at it unaffected. It was long, slender, like him, thinly furnished of pubic hair, the head sharp, purplish. It held no attraction, though it was longer than normal, longer even than Randy's or Clan's, but small around, like a hard willow stick, so white blue veins showed plainly.

"Like that, doan you, boy," he said, still holding my hand.

"Looks like a dog's pintle," I said, spitting on the ground. I had to over emphasize, or he would get suspicious.

His eyes suddenly popped. They burned on me.

"A dog's huh? Smart alec fairy!"

He grabbed my pants, unbuckled my belt, unbuttoned my fly, slipped my pants down to my knees. One hand goes up my thigh lovingly, then to my peter, which he takes out of my underwear, plays with it, cups my stones, then, though I fight his hands, tears my underwear off.

"Leave me alone!" I shouted, blinded by tears, trembling from fright. I try to pull up my pants,

but his hands keep wandering.

He slapped me full across the mouth. My head rang. I stumbled. He is onto me then, struggling, trying to turn my body around. In frantic desperation I break loose. I began to run across the stretch of sand, through a field of pussy willow catkins, which are waist high, and heeds my flight. My pants, hanging about my knees, all but trip me, and he is on me again. His hard fists pound against my back, my shoulder, against the back of my head. We go down in the catkins together, me on my stomach, he on his, and I am suddenly entwined with arms and legs, I can feel his sharp, knife sharp organ thrusting for me, searching out my rectum, and suddenly, as stark terror runs through me, I realize his intentions, and I squirm and fight like a madman. I bit his hands, his arms, drawing blood, and he strikes me so hard on the back of my head my senses reel. My basket of stones are flung out from me, and Mingo's split oak basket is crushed by both our weight.

His organ finds its target, his arms and legs has locked me in a firm grip, like something in a vice, and I know I cannot escape. I have a vision of the nightmare, know with sweat popping out on my brow what I am to experience, and I scream:

"Please! please—not without . . . grease!"

"Yo want it licked up, huh?" he cried, and with a rough jerk, turned me around, thrust his rancid organ into my mouth, his thumbs pressing like steel on each side of my jaws until my lips part, until the

purplish head goes in between my teeth, over my tongue. "Lick it up, boy, lick it up!" he moans, his hair in his eyes, his eyes a cold glitter now in his urge to rape. "Get it slick, boy! Get it juiced up!" He jerked it out of my mouth, slaps me on my stomach, and like an animal, an animal who instinctively finds the softness of the womb, so his sharp organ pierced me, taking with its sharpness a rigid pain that paralyzes my every sense, my every nerve. It goes all the way in that one long endless thrust, prodding to my naval, it seems, stirring my guts, and I began to scream.

My cries only galvanize his actions, quickening his lust, his act of rape, and his body moves with the frenzy of an animal's. Then, somehow, there is a third person amid the pain. Elbert is being jerked up, with the agility of slight of hand. His organ is popped out of me, with a dull sound, like a cork out of a bottle, and turning, blinded by tears, I saw Mingo's huge body, saw his arms fling out, shake Elbert violently, then slam one hard fist into his face, then another, then another.

Before I realize what is taking place, Elbert breaks free, runs through the tall catkins, leaving his bagged game and his rifle behind. Then Mingo bends over me.

"Are you alright, Cutty, are you hurt?" he asked, his huge hands rubbing my face, caressing my dark hair.

"I don't know," I answered, still feeling a sharp pain in my rectum, as if Elbert is still there, pound-

ing, pounding.

Without looking at my nakedness, he slipped up my pants, then picked me up, as if I was a babe, and carried me to his cabin. He laid me on the soft fur, then took off my clothes, his huge hands lovingly over my body, inspecting my legs, my abdomen, my face where Elbert's hard knuckles had cut and bruised.

He turned me over on my stomach, inspected my shoulders, then spreading my thighs slightly placed one finger directly below my rectum and pressed firmly. I winced, the agony coming afresh.

"He has hurt you internally," he said, turning me back over, and how I loved his warm hands on my body, the care with which he touched me, inspecting me inch by inch, seeing everything there was to see about me. I saw his dark eyes go down the length of my body, saw them pause at my crotch, felt his hand slide down my stomach, about my thighs, beneath my balls, as he inspected me completely.

There was a huge fire going in the hearth, the fur bed was as soft and balmy as ducks down, and in this room, with him, I was in a bit of heaven. The firelight caught his eyes, reflected there, and as he looked at me I saw warmth and affection and concern.

"I'll be back in a minute," he said, patting me on the face, and he left me there in that glowing warmth, and went out into the cold. A moment more he was back, carrying an armful of pine needles.

dles. He took a clay urn, filled it with boiling water, then placed some of the pine needles in, then helped me up and bade me sit on the urn.

"The pine rosin and the fumes from the hot water will soak up into you," he whispered, holding me so that I could keep my balance. "This will tighten the flesh tissues inside you where his attack on you has bruised you, and will toughen the rectum muscles."

When I had sat on the urn for a long time, he lifted me up and lay me back on the fur bed. Then he massaged my buttocks, putting pressure on my rectum, then releasing his hand quickly to determine if I still felt pain.

I lay like a child, relishing his caresses, enchanted by the magic touch of his hands, his physical presence, my dreams at last taking form, coming to reality under his touch, under the music of his soothing voice.

He then lay on the bed beside me, and his dark eyes, like a curious bird, looked at me.

"I am ashamed," I said in a whisper, hiding my eyes with my hand. He took my hand and laid it to one side. Then looked at me again.

"Do not be, Cutty," he said. "This is a common thing among the Indians. Of old, warriors had young braves to ride with them into battle, so that they could satisfy themselves away from their women."

I was shocked at this. I never knew he was aware of such things among men.

"And—the braves liked it?" I asked, deeply curious.

"They regarded it as a sacred duty to the older, braver warriors who they admired. To give pleasure is an honor."

I looked at him then, puzzled, but awakened now to another reality, and one in my favor. He was lighting another dark place within me. He was bringing to light something I had longed to discuss with him for a long time, his own desires, and I asked him point blank:

"Did you have a young warrior?"

"No, I have never chosen one for my pleasures," he said gravely, glancing the length of me. "But if I so chose, I would choose you, Cutty. You are beautiful. My heart and my body longs to touch you."

"You can have me," I said, surrendering my whole being to him, not just my body which he could take gladly, but all of me, my heart, my soul.

"When you are well, I will take you," he whispered, and his voice, smooth as silk, was like the gods. "But I will show you how it can be done without pain."

His hands went over me then, feeling of every part of my body, then his lips, on my chest, my thighs, my toes. He even put my toes in his mouth, giving me a sample of his lips warmth, then up to my brow, where he kissed longingly.

"Indians do not kiss," he explained, his dark face close to mine.

"Then why do you?" I asked, wishing that he

would never stop.

"My father was a white man," he said, but without seeming regret. "I learned his ways. You can say much with your mouth and your tongue that you cannot say with words. It is my message to you, telling you I hold you next to my heart. Let my tongue warm your breast, as the sun warms the earth. Let your loins be my pleasure, as the womb of the squaw, let me plant my seed inside your body for safe keeping, for I know you love me, Cutty Ragan, as woman loves man."

* * *

Come when the moon is in the willows, he had said, so I went. Nothing could have stopped me. I went as if drawn by invisible threads, conjured by his spell that was upon me, my mind vexed, my whole body willed, born for this moment.

I went down the moonlit lane, under the umbrella magnolias, where my mother had gone as a bride, and through the catkins, where Elbert had so ruthlessly taken me, to the little cabin of my dreams.

A fire was going in the hearth, a stack of bright embers beneath the dog irons, like a vivid miniature hell, and the fur spread had been spread out on the stone floor.

Mingo sat in one corner of the room, his bright Indian blanket spread around him, his raven black hair unplaited, hanging loose, like a dark dream, about his shoulders. He beckoned for me to come

over to where he sat and, without a word, he began to take off my clothes. When I stood naked before him, my tiny body reflecting the firelight, he pulled me to him, against the blanket, and kissed me on the nipples, solemnly, as if in a ritual. Then he asked me to lie down on the fur. I obeyed and, when I looked up at him, he stood up and let the blanket fall from his shoulders. He was naked, and my hungry eyes filled my longing with every portion of him. He was dark, so wondrous dark, as dark as death, but as vital as life, one side of his body caught up in the reflection of the flames. Jet black hair, blacker now by the firelight, lay over his wide chest, where his huge nipples stood out vividly, and down to his navel, then to the mats of hair, hair at least a half a foot long from his navel to his crotch, where it lay in a curled nest, there to swirl around his organ, a powerful instrument, round and stripped with veins and muscle, to a dark head, almost purple, and rich, ripe nuts in their sling of dark hide, like wet gourds. And thighs, what enormous, sensuous thighs. I lay there, too weak to move, my eyes petrified, my being wrapped up in the scene of this tall dark man beside me.

I was his, and he was going to take me, to seek pleasure in the pleasure of my willing body, and no one, not the world, not even God, could stop us.

We were alone in the universe, hidden from life, entombed in this dark cave glowing with the Devil's fire, and about it, as I lay naked on the warm fur, the scents, the aroma of tobacco, of male sweat,

of syrup and leaves and tanned hide, of hog fat and bacon and yeast, I was swallowed up by this male and the aura of him. I was in ecstasy, in rapture that what was to pass would pass and, helpless, undefended, I would become his, regardless of the pain . . . but he said there would be no pain, so my eyes drank him in to me, like an embrace, thinking how kind he had been to me, his warmth, his devotion, his protection. And I gloried to give myself to him quickly, to feel his maddening touch, longed to reach up and pull him down to me, to feel the weight of his powerful dark body on mine, feel his penetration, to know we were locked in sex, joined, but I waited, waited his next move . . .

He sank to his knees. Then picking up a handful of pickerel weed, he rubbed it into his dark hair, crushing the water filled stalks, then over his naked body until it shone in the crimson light. Then, dabbing his hand in a clay bowl of pig fat, he massaged his organ and nuts, bringing his hands up and down longingly until he was primed for passion, until his dark loins were turgid, throbbing for flesh to enter flesh.

Letting out animal moans, like a wolf howl, he bent over me, his lips going over my body, lips hot now, as hot as my desire for him, my starved, cultivated desire, my desire grown molten during these last days of waiting.

Then turning me over on his stomach, he lifted me up until I was on all fours, so to speak, or on my hands and knees. He sniffed at my loins, like an

animal, then rearing up, mounted me. His penetration was painless as it was noiseless, like a stud horse with a mare, with one deliberate thrust, to the hilt, then he pivots his body, his buttocks against my buttocks, like a dog or wolf will do, and locking his enormous legs in mine, he continues, his thrusts, his strokes powerful, forcing my stomach to the soft fur, then lifting me again, his motions like that of a well pump when it goes straight down through a narrow gorge into the well.

As this motion, this preparation, seemed like a dream to me, a fantastic unheard of dream that has no real beginning, and would not seem to end. But it went on and on through the night, our bodies caught up in the miniature hell, bathed by the fiery reflection, our shadows flung out against the dark pelt, crouching beasts one moment, still, dark shapes the next.

Awesome to be certain, and I could not bring myself to believe that it was this majestic being, this stalwart, gallant Mingo, who I but little less than worshipped, was on his hands and knees like a giant timber wolf, drawing out his pleasures, taking his will of me as the wolf, will take a mate, overlapping time and the night with his belated passion, delaying action for the prolonged ecstasy it brought him, giving while taking.

But now, during this reign of madness, with which we both had harbored, planned, dreamed, laying out the plans in our minds as a criminal will lay out a hideous crime, we were beyond ourselves,

swept up on the raw tides of passion, logic forgotten in all but the doing, daylight, tomorrow, respectability, sanctity, things so far distant they were non-existent.

We were no longer men, as I will remember later, but animals gone stark ravenous, urged on by something primitive, something which we could no more master than we could master the warmth of the sun, the movements of the planets. We were at our base natures, which really was the beginning of mankind, a throwback to our ancestors, when the taking of sexual delight was, probably life's only pleasure and our minds had not yet raised themselves up from of the dark ravine of our indulgence to find the cathedrals of our souls.

This savage, this dignified savage had brought me to bay in the darkness of this tiny cave, in the midst of these fierce flames, to beguile me, to take me, to carry me back into that primeval maw of the forgotten past, into what his ancestors once were, into what we now had become. We were mediums, without identity. We were hunks of flesh eating on one another, groping in the shadowy darkness, and then he was over me, somehow, his face to mine, his mouth drawing out passion, his huge, wondrous body filling my world.

All night in this lap of madness, following out his directions, my small body a helpless foil to the pattern of his appetites, drinking a power that loosed itself upon me, like a hot liquid spilled over my body, yet intact somehow, one moment tearing

animal, then rearing up, mounted me. His penetration was painless as it was noiseless, like a stud horse with a mare, with one deliberate thrust, to the hilt, then he pivots his body, his buttocks against my buttocks, like a dog or wolf will do, and, locking his enormous legs in mine, he continues, his thrusts, his strokes powerful, forcing my stomach to the soft fur, then lifting me again, his motions like that of a well pump when it goes straight down through a narrow gorge into the well.

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at me with gnashing lips as smooth as silk, the next mounting me, giving me strength by the loss of his own.

At last, when the fire had turned to embers, and the moon had gone over the bowl of the sky, we lay in each others arms, the heavy odors of grease, of pickerel weed, of flesh, of sweat, infiltrating our bedding, and making of our warm cave a memory, as if nothing had happened.

We had gone into the past, our bodies not bodies of modern man, but of that primeval times long past, of a mating that had come to pass, that had come to glow, to rise into molten ecstasy, then to ebb in painless anarchy, a ghost-mating, shades of the primeval beast-dark shapes of coarse hair and fiery eyes calling to the moon, and locking bodies in a seizure of half-death, deep in the savage, carnal days of Abba Inca, when the world was fresh born.

CHAPTER FOUR

After my long-desired surrender to Mingo I changed. I was no longer the innocent novice, tried amateurishly by boys like Randy and Clan, experiments really. Too, they had taken me, through no maneuvering, through no calculating or lust of my own. But with Mingo—I had gone to him through the twilight for that purpose. I had willed to have it happen as it did, coveted him, dreamed of it, planned it, instilling it in my brain and in turn instilling it in his. Like a magnet, my cravings had pulled him into my way of thinking.

I was all to blame. As much to blame as if I had bound him and committed rape. My evilness made him evil. My corrupt desires made him likewise also desirous.

Something was wrong with the world.

Though I had accomplished what I set out to accomplish with him, had filled my body and my heart with his body and heart, had seen him naked, in the primitive throes of passion, as primitive as any man can get, something was wrong. I did not know what it was. Once, I felt that if I ever chanced to win him to me then I would be perfectly happy. Now I had him and I wasn't happy. Guilt, a

deep prolonged guilt stirred me to the deep recesses of my being, and I felt wicked through and through, rotten in the eyes of the world, and more assuredly rotten in my eyes also.

Now, I felt older somehow. I no longer seemed fit in with the boys my age at school. I was no longer amused by them at Papa's store every Sunday. They were children to me now, callow everything they said or did, and I was grown man, a child-man. I had experienced something they would never experience, a base physical something, unnamed and unheard of before, and the experience had cut a deep gorge between them and me . . . with everyone for that matter.

Every time I thought of Mingo and I in the cabin, lying together on that fire-lit fur, doing what we did, my face went crimson. Had I done murder I would have felt less guilt. Yet, still, I had gone myself on the essence of it, had completely abandoned myself in the doing. I had immersed myself like those who are saved at church, except that the immersing had been one of deep, undeniable sin and not salvation.

I had turned animal. Like dogs or wolves, who, after so many years of domesticity, revert to the call of the wild, and run in packs like their ancestors who kill, spill blood, for the joy of killing. So had I, under Mingo's savage spell, turned back the page of time, had retreated into that other world, leaving all my convictions—my very soul—behind.

Yet, because I was deeply ashamed of what I had

done, I wanted, and with a sinking heart, never to repeat the act again, but I could not. The memory of it, the ecstasy, Mingo's personality which dragged at mine, would not let me quit, would not let me forget the sweetness that had mixed with the ugliness, the heaven that had mingled with the hell, the elation that lay with the shame.

I was doomed.

Even my physical appearance changed. I changed into what Mingo was. I turned savage. All that I had known, all that I had learned, all that I had tried desperately to be, was of little moment. These things became as nothing to me . . . nay . . . even less than nothing. I shed them like trees shed dead leaves in the winter. I discarded all the old things, the old ways I did not need, and adorned myself with the new things, the new ways that were like Mingo.

With the money I had saved from the painted stones I bought a rifle, as an excuse to be with Mingo as much as possible, and he and I went on week-end hunting jaunts, bagging deer, muskrat, possum, and fox. This pleased Papa, for he could sell both the meat and the hides, and because of what Mingo and I did what we did when we were together, I made certain our captured game was bountiful.

Mama complained, said I was turning into a heathen, which I was, and I got a double dose of the Bible. Whenever I was at home with her, here

before the fire with several varicolored knitted shawls around her, the Bible was usually in her lap and if there was an ear to hear she read aloud. When she was so tired and weary of reading to me . . . or preaching . . . she would fall asleep in her chair, the Bible tumbling to the floor. When she slept her whole person rose and fell like a tropical sea. Her eyes shut were like those of a statue behind the lids of which one knows there are no pupils. Whenever I knew she would not stir, I went out the back way and down to the cabin to Mingo. There, untroubled by devils and angels, I was myself.

One weekend a little after Christmas, Mama invited the young preacher for dinner. At the time I did not know it was on account of me. It was a beautiful weekend, a flood of rain followed by a drop in the temperature which brought ice and promise of snow.

After supper, and around the huge fire, its blaze reminding me of Mingo's cabin, and I was unable to go to him, Mama brought up a surprising subject.

"Brother Simon," she said, her long bone fingers running over the Bible in her lap carefully. "Our boy Cutty is no Christian."

I jumped. I was seated on the carpet between them, my mind lost in jumbled thought of Mingo and me.

Brother Simon looked as surprised as I, and his sparkling blue eyes found mine, then to her, who demanded his attention.

"And how do you make that out, Mrs. Ragan?" he asked, his eyes finding hers, where they rested.

"He moons," she answered directly, and as if she had said: he sins. "He has left his Papa and me for a savage."

"I do not understand," Brother Simon asked, his face, and such a handsome face it was there in the firelight, a bland mask.

"He no longer loves us," she explained, looking at me with her dark, hawk eyes in an accusing way.

"And how do you know that?" he asked, folding his short, muscular hands over one knee. He was but twenty-four, a trial preacher from the Methodist College in Jackson, loaned out to our church as a test of his ability. Short, muscular, blond, his complexion fair, his eyes radiant, alive by their long curling black lashes, clean of body and mind, he was like Jesus to me . . . or the impression I had of Jesus. Rugged, but not coarse, learned but not sophisticated, honest but not a prude, religious but not pious.

Mama twisted down her lips and gazed into the fire.

"I feel the loss," she said sadly. "His heart, his soul is elsewhere. Something or someone has taken him from us. And it is one's Christian duty to love one's parents."

The preacher leaned toward her.

"Mrs. Ragan, it is only natural for a boy, when he grows up, as Cutty here, to drift you might say from his parents. It is maturing."

He was nearer my age than my folks, so he understood youth more.

"Look at him, Brother Simon," she implored, pointing at me. "Does he look like one of us? His hair like Mingo's. His clothes like Mingo's. His ways like Mingo's. He has forgot his folks; took up with this Indian, forgot all his Papa and me taught him. He's turned wild, Brother Simon. All he wants to do is stay at that cabin and—and hunt and live like them Choctaws."

I went crimson. Her words struck home. I did live like Mingo. I was a savage. Worse, I was Mingo's mate.

"Maybe he's but lost," the preacher informed her, looking at me sideways and winking. "Like a lad with a maid."

I flinched.

"But—there is no maid," Mama put in obstinately. "If it was a girl I could understand his mooning. But with a savage . . .!"

"Hero worship," the preacher added, his face a little more serious. "A year or two and Cutty'll be laying aside his rifle and his hunting trips with Mingo and will be courting some local girl. It's only natural for boys to love to hunt, to keep to the woods. It's in their blood, part of their American heritage."

Mama's face puckered up, like a wrinkled dried apple in the light of the living room flames.

"It's just not natural, Brother Simon, for an boy, even my Cutty here, to grow up loving an

mals, then all of a sudden get the urge to kill em. He's been influenced by Mingo. And all Indian's are heathens!"

"That is not so, Mama!" I cried, thinking how kind Mingo was at times, how considerate, how protective, remembering the many times he had freed small animals from traps, had doctored them, had worked sometimes for hours to place stray animals with their parents. Only those with the kindest of hearts took the time to do such things.

"You see," Mama cried hoarsely, with mockery. "Taking up for that savage, and contradicting his poor mother!"

"Oh, Mama," I cajoled, embarrassed in front of the preacher for her treating me like a child.

"You could dismiss this Indian," the preacher suggested, glancing at Mama sideways, "if you consider him bad influence."

My heart leaped to my throat. Make Mingo leave! I'd rather he was dead first.

Mama thought for a moment, her hands folded over her Bible. She leaned back in her chair, her eyes staring once again into the red coals, as if she saw the answer there.

"I could," she answered finally, not looking at either of us. "We could fire him, send him on his way, back to Tishomingo county, or wherever he came from, but . . . but, that would be like taking the garden of Eden from Eve, in order to erase the temptation . . . or taking Gomorrah from Lot!"

The preacher looked down at me, his expression

fixed, and I tried to hold his gaze, but faltered shamefacedly. It seemed, all of a sudden, that Mama knew everything about Mingo and me, and I stared at the fire, saw the fiery furnace I had heard so much about from the pulpit on Sundays.

Brother Simon rose from his chair, stretched, then, going to the window, pulled back the heavy wine colored drapes and peered out into the wet darkness.

"It's getting worse," he said, his brows twisting in a frown. He then looked at me. "Would it be asking too much of your hospitality if I stayed the night?"

"Why lands sakes, no," Mama insisted, pulling her shawls about her bent shoulders and trying to get up. I hastened to assist her. "Forgive my manners for not asking you afore, with this weather out like it is, and the roads a river from here to Jackson. You'd never make it in this storm. You can share Cutty's room—if'n you can stand the smell of Indian."

The preacher winked at me again then, asking us to bow our heads, he uttered a simple prayer: to deliver us from sin, to restore my faith, and to calm the turbulence of the waters.

Taking one of the kerosene lamps, I escorted him into my bedroom. Setting the lamp on the marble topped table beside the bed, I turned back the quilts, fluffed up the feather mattress, the enormous white feather pillows, then nervously turned to face him. I always got the goose pimples when in

his presence, due to his handsomeness, his clean air look, his calm, assured manner, basking in everything he said, as if it was handed straight from the lips of God, and feeling so inferior, so earthly common, as if I was in the presence of something sacred, a relic straight out of the old testament.

I knew that he was clean, innocent, one of Jesus' cherished lambs, an agent of God, here for a task then to rise again into heaven, his home. He had always endowed me with something of the superhuman, the god-man, the mortal-immortal, finer than other men, more beautiful of form because he was more religious, because his perfection was housed in a perfect temple. I considered him like the magnolia blossom, which stands in apparent changelessness in a silent rose and white eternity, so he seemed to me a stationary being. But, the magnolia has budded and bloomed and closed again while you thought it still, and it dies . . . the rayed and rosy cup so full of airy sweetness . . . it turns purple from mortals breath, from earths commonness, and dies in a single day.

"I . . . I am sorry about Mama," I managed to say, defending myself and not her. I stood on one side of the bed and him on the other.

He gave a wry smile.

"Do not be," he said. "In every woman there is that love for a small boy, and more so if she has a son. You will always be a small child to her, impossible to mature in her eyes."

"But I don't want to hurt her," I cried, and my

voice trembled. I knew what I did with Mingo (God! if she ever knew!) with Randy and with the Clan would hurt her, kill her, and I was not strong enough to decide between the two ... her life or mine.

He frowned, his eyes drawn to a horn cup Mingo had made for me and which sat on a table on the side of the bed. He picked it up and examined it carefully.

"How can we keep from hurting the ones we love, Cutty?" he asked, answering with a question. "No matter what we seem to do, we go on hurting them." He held the horn cup up, then sat it back on the table. "You do admire this Indian, don't you?" he declared, rather asked. "This room is filled with the evidence."

I swallowed hard, my heart rising to my throat.

"Mingo is good to me," I answered, nodding slowly. "He has taught me many things. Mingo is wise beyond his years. Any boy ... would like him if he got to know him as I do."

"It is good to have someone before you to admire, like Alexander admired the Roman soldier, the conqueror." He said this with a catchy voice, a mocking voice, I thought. I glanced at him quickly to see if there was mockery on his face, in his expression, but there was none. He was merely stating a fact ... or, was he testing me? No, he was too genuinely good, too noble for that.

He sat down on the bed and began to take off his dark suit. I followed after his actions, my moccasins

sins first, then my bluish-brown buckskin blouse with the tassels, then, timidly, last my pants. To my amazement, and embarrassment, he completely undressed, even his winter underwear, which fell in a soft white heap around his bare feet.

He was as smooth as satin, the dim light of the oil lamp glowing along his thick chest, his flat stomach, his fine thick thighs, his glowing body hair, which under the lamp was like the gold of cut wheat. He fairly shone, his utterly smooth flesh like porcelain, like the China cups of Mama's that stood on the dining room shelves and caught the gold of the hearthfire in their rounded shapes.

I could not help but stare. Where Mingo was dark, savage, he was golden, a lance of light in this warm, wintry room. And for some odd reason I imagined that Jesus would look like this if one saw him stripped, that nothing about him would be repulsive, not even his nakedness, not even his pubic hair, nor organ, which radiated with pure, sublime health . . . health without the advertisement of sex. Though this man before me possessed all the potentials for sex, beautifully formed, unmarked by blemish, scar or discoloring, he seemed too pure for such carnal play, too virtuous to even contemplate such things, let alone do them.

He and Mingo were such exact opposites. Mingo was so dark, so raven dark, his skin, his muscles, his form filled with shadows and haunted places, while this man was filled with light, as if lit from within, glowing radiantly, observable under any

light, bathed in it, like a globe around a lamp.

Mingo's personality dragged at mine. Already he was stronger than my fugitive impulses, my wilting reserve. He was always like a hand tearing open a triplet of sorrel leaves folded for rain, so strong in their impulse for self-protection that they could only be conquered by destruction. In a remote, but fatal way, I was afraid of him, especially since that first night with sex, yet days without him were saltless food. There was a ruthlessness about him: the male instinct unaccompanied by humility, the patrician instinct unaccompanied by sympathy, the sportsman's instinct unaccompanied by pity. What Mingo began he would finish. And as I looked across the bed at this wonderful person glorified in his own pure beauty, I asked myself what had Mingo begun?

But when I lay down, and this person lay down beside me, the lamp blown out, the little room cloaked in darkness and cold, I could not keep my mind clear of Mingo, each moment more perturbed. Thinking of him was short and simple, but it gathered an extraordinary pathos as it progressed. I was torn by the two men, knowing what I should follow in one, what I must deny in the other.

Silence fell. The utter silence of winter night. Even the limbs of the naked trees stilled, and only the forlorn sounds of dripping water could be heard. The light on the window sills eyed me in white silence, like tear drops in tiny animal eyes, and their dewy golden eyes seemed akin to Mingo's.

and my own. The sight, as I peered over the thick quilts and looked, frightened me with old dreams, faintly reminiscent of Mingo and mysterious lost ecstasy. I felt these things deeply and was depressed. A great pity for Mingo and his following of the forlorn, like a creature of the wilds, surged over me. A kind of dread grew up in me, now that we had discussed Mingo, that I might not be able to defend him as I would wish, as he would wish, should the subject come up again, especially with Simon. Since he had come to our house with his sad philosophy of experience, I began to take notice of things.

It did look odd, me with Mingo.

But why should I care, my heart cried? He was all I had.

I turned my head and looked at Brother Simon. His face was turned toward mine, his eyes were closed, and his golden hair lay tumbled over the pillow like the Golden Fleece, I thought, in the old story.

I lay and listened to his quiet breathing, thinking how content he was, how clean, how noble, his life unwarped by troubles and passion and confusion, unmarred by strange desires and patterns which must be kept hidden from the world. Looking at him, studying his shiny brow, his lips that shone in the faint wintry light, I thought him like David who had dreamed and who had prophesied the coming of Jesus.

In the realm of this celestial being, haloed by his

goodness, I sensed forlornly that my life had to change. I could not go on doing the things I did, hiding my life from people who would have disowned me had they known. I wanted, suddenly, to be like Simon, to be able to walk in the light of day to tell everyone everything I did, without feeling shame, to share my life with people who would love the sharing.

Too, I wanted Mingo. I would always want him. I would want him, even though each time I slipped through the magnolia trees to his cabin I was uncertain and tinged with fear. I was afraid of his physical power, his animal impulsiveness, his desperation to have me, to finish his passion, once I was in his grip. Yet, I went, and would always want to go, despite my fears, my afterglow of shame.

And, even as I lay and thought these maddening things, fought them against my will, battled the savage animalism of Mingo with the pure, sunlit radiance of Simon, I felt an arm slide up my body, felt Simon's hand go under the back of my neck and lift me to him, felt my body being cradled in his.

Like the solemn dignity when one enters church especially if you are alone, I felt then strangely protected, strangely understood.

His warm lips, like honeycomb in the bright sun went over mine, at first without passion, the warm kiss of friendship, not like Judas kissed Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, but like a brother might kiss a brother. Then, his arms, muscular and huge

but warm, soundly soft, crushed me to his chest, and one of his thighs went over my legs, crept up to my stomach.

Though my mind fought his will, clutched at the sides of the ravine of caution, my body could not resist. I sank wholly into him, into his arms, his wonderful naked body, as if drowning, and sinking into the enormous waves of a sea. I went down, down, down, limp with my own undeniable weakness, never bothering to save myself from the glowing tide of his flesh, his being.

Suddenly, I was his, but clay in his hands, being molded as he wanted me, responding to his every move, his every intention.

Never had anyone such a power of love, and love making . . . and all because he was so pure, I thought dreamily. He was so pure, so good, so heavenly untarnished, and all the will, the emotion, the passion I had in my own body swelled to give him what he wanted, pleasure, love, happiness, whatever. And in wanting to give to him, oddly I felt sorry for him, all the more because he had lived such a wholesome life, had sacrificed so much, had denied himself so much, and in his warm arms, molded into his body, I wanted to do something for him, to give him something of life, something vital, stark, something of the flesh, the thrills that man thrilled, to for once, this glorious winter night in this dark room, to break him free of his old, strict obligations, to unshackle his bonds of serfdom, and let him roam in the field of his own obvious man-

hood, his own torrid passion.

Like a little boy who had been locked in a room and never permitted to see the world, I wanted desperately, as he held me, kissed me, to set him free.

Our bodies together, glowing under the thick layer of quilts, brought on his desire, and as he eased his torso up over the pillows, his hands insistently on my shoulders pressing longingly down, sank between his legs, my mouth hungrily going over his organ, drinking out the glory of him. And strange, though I had never done such a thing, sensed no shame, I only wanted to make him happy, without giving concern to mine.

His organ, nestled in its home of curly hair spongy soft even on an erection, filled my world and I felt I was doing him a great holy service, as groped there in the hollow of his fine clean limb taking every caution to touch him with the utmost care, to give him the ecstasy I thought he deserved. I was not clumsy. I went at it as though it was the embodiment of my life's work, the fulfillment of my being, the ultimate purpose from which I was born to serve. Never in my life did I so give myself, never did I so want to serve, to please. I wanted to thank this religious man whose male beauty was unsurpassed, pure, even between his thighs, because the man was Simon . . . and in my own subconscious . . . the son of God.

To me, it was not sex, not perverted passion, nothing that was evil, nor wrong, nor of the flesh.

portions of iniquity, though I carressed his inner thighs, held them aloft with hands that shook, and fed on the nectar of his bearing, as an elf might nibble fruit from a limb, eating contentedly, undisturbed by time nor want nor moral obligation, as innocent as a calf at its mother's udders, stripping out the divine milk of life, obeying every sense within me to obey every emotion within him. And when his pure milk streamed out at last, warm from the furnace of his flesh, and into my own being, my soul bowed, his milk the altar wine, and we both lay still, his organ still between my pulsating lips, we touched something of the spiritual.

But then, all too soon, he was the God-man, and I the Judas.

He pulled me up to him, embraced me, and kissed me warmly on the mouth.

"Forgive me," he whispered, his lips moving over close to my ear.

Then shaken by the spirituality of it, I awakened to reality.

"There is nothing to forgive," I answered, setting my face next to his. "If I made you happy."

"I should have stopped . . . should have stopped us both, before . . ." he mumbled, stroking his hair, turning his head toward the ceiling, as if in the attitude of one praying. "Shouldn't have let you do that . . ."

Swayed by the purity of him, embalmed by his male beauty, the idea that he and I had come so close together, and in passion, I said bravely:

"I wanted to. I've always wanted to, I think."

"Don't say that," he cautioned, though I failed to heed his true meaning. "Don't say . . . that you've coveted . . . me."

"Is it wrong to want someone?" I asked, in a muffled whisper, my face still close to his, his arms still embracing me. "I cannot help it if I like you, Brother Simon."

"Cutty, it flatters me that you like me, but no more than that. But it was all my fault. I should have known, for I am older, supposedly a man of God, and should set noble examples for my fold."

He said the word fold very lovingly, as though he cherished every person at his church, which made me all the more fond of him. And he seemed all the more good to me, as wholesome as bread.

He was so different from Mingo, yet so wanting. Even his purity made him maddening in my eyes, and I basked in his presence, gloried in his arms around me.

"Don't blame yourself," I insisted, up in arms for his sake. "Being with you . . . was like having Jesus, and nothing—no nothing could be wrong with that."

"You imagined me Jesus?"

I told him I had, that it was not the ugly, sinful thing he thought it was. He was silent for a long moment. I could hear his breathing, not calm, arrested as it had been earlier, but troubled now as my own life was troubled. I had touched him, and I had affected him.

"Cutty, I do not know what to say," he murmured at last. He withdrew his arms and turned on his back. Suddenly I felt cold, neglected, but I did not dare try and pursue his emotions. I must only give to him when he wanted me. The faithful mate. "What made you think Jesus would . . . would consent to such a thing . . . to want it done . . .?"

He put it badly, and I was embarrassed for him, and felt pangs of sorrow for this timid, kind person who was too good for life, the ugliness of living. And I said:

"I never thought he would." I tried to gather my words. "But I have always thought him a man like everybody else, but better, better than any man on earth. But I always wanted him not to die on the cross, to live as other men, to do the things other men do, and I wished he could be happy—like I wish you could be happy. I want you to feel what other men feel, to thrill you as other men. You are good," and I swallowed hard, thinking of him, hesitating. "You are the finest man I know and you deserve to be happy."

He sat up in bed, the quilts gathered around his loins. The night sky, lit strangely now with the falling of snow, sifted down onto his naked chest, his rumpled yellow hair, and he looked like the painting of Daniel in the lions den.

"You did this . . . to make me happy, pretending me Jesus?"

I told him I did.

"I am a long way from Jesus, Cutty," he said

then, and his voice, deep and guttural, sounding troubled. "I have sinned twice tonight."

"How so?" I was quick to reply.

He looked at the walls, then out the window at the new fallen snow.

"We should find a place outside to talk. Your folks," he paused, reaching for his clothes. "They might awaken."

We dressed quietly, in silence, threw our coats about our shoulders, and went outside into the cold.

We went down the lane toward the barn, through the blanket of luminous snow, and down the little path which led under the umbrella magnolias toward Mingo's cabin. The sky was death gray, one solid shroud of pale ghostly light, hanging, it seemed, but just above the trees, whose black naked limbs thrust upwards like cruel briars. Snow sprinkled down around us, on our heads and shoulders, and made of the barn and out-houses and fence rows dark uncertain silhouettes.

Now that passion had flown, now that logic and reasoning and vindication had taken the place of sex, love, anarchy, my senses reeled. I had come back to reality with a jolt, in this cool afterglow of our ecstasy, and saw what a predicament I was in. I had let passion go to my head, and I sensed something of the seriousness of the after effects. I had brought my shame into the enemy's territory, and I trembled oddly as we paused there on the watershed of the hill, not from the cold but from my

own premonition of the future.

He would not look at me as he began to speak, but kept his eyes glued to the ground, where he separated a clot of snow with his shoe.

"Cutty, I did what we did back there . . . just on purpose . . . to find out about you."

"What?" I cried, as the truth of it all struck home. I almost went limp. My knees felt like water. I shivered, blowing vapor out my nose.

"The awful truth," he stammered, his head still bowed, "I hate to put it this way, but it must be said. The truth's the truth."

I went crimson and blind.

"A hypocrite's trick!" I blurted out, before I could think.

"I know, Cutty. A hypocrite's trick. That is why I said a minute ago in the house that I had sinned twice. Once with my schemes and once with my body."

I glared at him across the snow. I had no defense left except my arrogance, my thwarted rage, and I half-shouted into the stillness of the night.

"You can't trust anybody these days!"

He reached out a hand to grasp my arm, but I jerked back. Somewhere a dog barked faintly.

"May God forgive me for that scheme," he said then, bowing his head. "And you, please forgive me too, Cutty."

"I bet you're going to tell me next that you didn't enjoy it?"

"I . . . I loathed every minute of it," he

confessed and, raising his head in a last defiance, looked at me, one long steady look.

I stood my ground. I had nothing left.

"Yeah . . . even when I was between your legs . . . you hated it, I bet."

"Oh, God! Don't go on like this . . . I will listen!"

"You will listen," I flung at him, finding my tongue, my own rights. "It was you who touched me first, it was you who—who kissed me. It was you who pushed me down between your legs. You wanted me to suck your dick!" I was shouting now, my fists clinched, my thwarted emotions unwounded. "Yes, Brother Simon, your dick! You wanted me to suck your dick! You knew what I was, and I didn't care. You just wanted sex. You just wanted to get your nuts off, to get sucked, cause you've never been sucked, have you, Brother Simon? You've never been sucked!"

"Stop! Stop!" he cried, flinging his hands to his ears, the flakes of snow scattering. His whole body bent forward, and through the dark density of the woods, I could see a faint shimmer to his black hair, a shimmer that brought back ecstasy, rapture, a nightmare memory.

Surprisingly to myself, I stopped and just stood there staring at him, too weak to move, too petrified by my own lack of good sense and my unheeded voice. I just stood there trembling, wanting to cry, but no tears came. Nothing was just in this world, no, nothing.

"Oh, God!" he murmured, sinking to his knees. "Punish me for my sins! And, God, forgive this boy ... forgive this boy!"

He was a black heap in the snow now, his body trembling with sobs, broken sobs that went through the night like something sadly wounded, and I had a sudden impulse to go to him, take him up into my arms, to hold him against all the misery, the torment of soul he felt.

"Was it all that terrible?" I asked gravely, bending over him, laying a hand on his shaking shoulder. "Was it really that bad?"

He stopped sniffing and, wiping his eyes, glanced up into mine.

"No, Cutty, I can't lie again. It wasn't terrible, not with you. May God forgive me, cut out my tongue, castrate me, but I . . . I . . ."

"You what?" I cried desperately, still bending over him, imploringly.

"It—it was what I thought it was . . . more, much more." He paused, sniffed, then got to his feet. He refused to look at me. "But . . . but I'll never do it again, never. Man is weak, and I was weak tonight. I let my emotions, my thoughts play tricks on me. When your mother spoke of—of Minggo and you, and then Gomorrah, well, I just put two and two together, and I wondered, and I thought, and . . ."

"And now that you know," I said coldly, glaring at him, trying to force him, by my voice, my words, my staring, to look at me.

"Maybe my knowing can be of some help to you."

"How? Making me suck your dick again?"

He jerked his head up, and his blue eyes found mine, and they were the saddest eyes I was ever see. With them was battling his loathing of the sex act with me, all it stood for, and his embarrassment to have to tell me so.

Then, he said softly, without a trace of emotion

"You will never do that again, Cutty, never."

I looked at him there backgrounded by the dark wall of pines, the pale ghostly sky, saw him square his shoulders, knew that he had triumphed after all, that my weakness of the flesh had made him weak, and I saw all that I had really lost. I saw him again in the bed, his body close to mine, my face in the dark valley of his loins, saw him pull me to him when now he was so cruelly cold, felt his lips again on mine, his strong arms around me, knew, understood his warmth, his purity, his wholesomeness and I knew he had spoken the truth when he said he would never have him again, knew that I would never lie close to him, share his passion, the joy of giving him my body, my love, knew all this profoundly, though coldly he had spoken, though final his verdict.

"No," I said parrot like. "We can never do that again."

"I am a man of God, Cutty, and I will stay a man of God," he assured me, but with a kind thoughtful voice. "And I must not, will not tamper

with the temptations of the flesh. You have given me a joy, and that joy is gone from us now, a thing of the past. But, Cutty, since I am a man of God, since we have an understanding of each other, allow this knowledge to help us both."

"How?" I asked meekly.

"Cutty, this Indian . . . this Mingo." He gripped my arm steadily, and there was compassion in his deep throaty voice. "You and him . . . together . . . what is it? Like what we did?"

I thought of him and me in the bed, his goodness, his being finer than I could be, ever hope to be, thought of what he said, that I had given him joy, and I favored him with the truth, the answer he sought.

"Sodomy," I answered, bowing my head. It was a shameful thing to confess, to anyone, let alone a man of God.

He coughed, let go of my arm.

"I thought as much. That is why you have turned savage . . . like him. He is stronger than you, can influence you. So, instead of the mysterious, transcendent illumination that passion brings to you—like to a woman—has brought only confusion, darkness, and a sense of something dragging at the roots of your being in that darkness. All the divine paradoxes of sex—the mastery of the lover and his deep humility, his idealization of his bride and her absolute surrender which you have no doubt carried out for him, being his lover, he has dragged in the mud, has crushed with his animal-

ism."

I turned from him sadly and looked down the hill, over the fields of snow and patches of dark pines, to the little cabin that, even at this late hour, gave out a faint yellow light, involving my senses deeply with a vision of him, the hearth fell embers, and him, in his dark maleness, stretched out on his lair of brown fur.

"He is all I have," I lamented, my voice so distant. "Cruel or not, animal or not, wrong or evil or not, he is all I have."

"Oh, Cutty," he cried, taking my arm again, turning me to face him. "Life is a death-pack that hunts at all hours, light and dark. Life is no phantom of dreams. It is not made of spirit words like Mingo, with fiery eyes of sex, a ghastly melody of a grisly music, but of our own fellows, all that human strength without wanting pity. It is not sex itself that gives horror to the living, this love for sex of one's own sex, so much as the lack of the impulse not to have sex. One flicker of merciful intention amid relentless action would redeem it. For the world is founded and built upon sex, and the reality of sex is neither to be questioned nor feared. Sex with your demon savage must be a dark dream to you, Cutty. It is to me. But it is not a nightmare. It is his lack of pity, his fatal propensity for violence, that is the nightmare. When a boy like you is confronted by helpless terror like Mingo, and without the impulse to run, to save, then the world becomes hell. For if this savage is a fiend, but w

pity, how can he in the mere pursuit of pleasure inflict wholly unnecessary torture?"

"I do not know," I answered in a whisper, shaking my head, filled with trouble and unrest, my mind snatching memories of Mingo and I in the little love cabin, and in the midst of it me and Simon, serene, sublime, clean in each others arms.

"Cutty," he then implored, looking at me for a long compassionate moment. "Take a fool's advice. Turn your back upon this kind of world. Or, if you cannot change, then leave this place, and find that world swarming with your kind elsewhere. Here, if you remain, you are only going to bring despair and shame on your family, and unhappiness for yourself."



CHAPTER FIVE

In that year of '27 I saw much of Brother Simon, and we became good friends, mainly because we understood each other, and mostly due to the fact that he was the one person in the world I looked up to, admired, sought to pattern my life after, and whom I realized wanted to truly help me, without wanting or demanding something in return, or, I liked to believe he wanted nothing.

I was trash compared to his noble ways, and I tried desperately to change. He was as pure as a dew drop, and I wanted him more than life. Yet, I wanted Mingo. I wanted the good in the one the evil in the other.

One day I told Simon how I wanted him, for I did not see how I could go on as things stood between us.

"You are pure," I said. "So pure it is sheer blasphemy to say such things to you, wanting you as I do."

And he had answered courteously.

"Blasphemy, my dear boy, is not a thing you can do against people. It is disagreeing with the Lord that is blasphemy." Then he added. "Cutty, I must ask you never to refer to me in such a light, that of wanting me, until you can think of me differently."

So, to please him, to win his favor, I tried to regard him as purity without my lusts. But I wished I could tell him all about it, the way I truly felt about him. But how could I explain that strange inner power that had driven me to Mingo to him? How could I tell him I wanted him, his tenderness, his understanding of me, most of all his guidance, that I found man's roughness preferable to man's velvet lips, his most masterful demand less wearing than their silent criticism, like his yet, how I yearned for him so desperately.

Too, Simon made it more difficult for me, and more confusing to my nature, my bearing, my affliction by saying.: "When you rid yourself of that savage then we can talk about us."

This was desolate news to me, no matter how hard I tried to be like Simon, for Mingo, now that he considered me his property, had become somehow necessary to me. I was unconscious of the reason of this need, not a spiritual one, but purely physiological. But I did not hate Mingo for this news. Such hatred, I knew, was abnormal. Nor did I love him. This would have been still more abnormal. But I must be in his house, I must do things for him, share his daily doings, sleep in his fur bed, and not in the four poster at the house.

Yet, balancing this with the purity of Simon, I knew it would also be grievous to leave Simon, turn my back on his guidance, which is love in a sense. He had become the one shelter between my flickering spirit and the storms of life. So I hesitated to

make my decision, putting off the inevitable, feeling that Mingo and the cabin would always be there, for my re-entry, if I could not make it with Simon. So I did not hurry.

But I knew, deep within me, that if it had not been for this entirely new passionate, spiritual longing for Simon, I would be happy, for the deep law of my being was to fulfill that law by returning to Mingo.

So, life went on at Papa's and Mama's, and I adapted myself to it as well as I could under Simon's new laws, the path he had paved for me to follow. And it was strange that the longer I lived under his guidance the more I thought about him, the more I read the Bible, the more I thought of religion. I always saw his face now, lined with some hidden grief, and very pale, not tanned and ruddy with fresh air as I had known him, when we had had sex together that snow filled night. It was as if his mentality reached across the valley to mine and laid its melancholy upon me.

In beholding Simon in the aurora of such sublime purity, I tried to see Mingo as he really was, not as one mated to him, his paramour, but as other men might see him.

Mingo could not help his over-virility, nor could he help having the insensitive nature that can enjoy sex, the physical side, without the spiritual. He could never be like Simon, no more than Simon could be like him. Mingo's presence tore to pieces the things I loved—delicate leafy things—as if they

were tissue-paper and he had walked through and Simon put these things together again. My own pleasure seemed to mean nothing when he was with me, and before his carnal passions my wonderful faery-haunted days shrivelled. Mingo had posed a deeper change on me than the change from boy to man . . . from maid to wife. He had robbed me of a thing rarer and frailer than maidenhood—the sacramental love of nature, like the thing which I admired in Simon. His theft was as cruel as that of one who destroyed a man's God, who destroyed my God, and the strange part of it was that Simon was trying to restore that broken thing to me.

Yet . . . I wanted Mingo.

I wanted Mingo, and I missed him, during my awesome reign away from him while I tried to follow Simon's ways, tried to walk into his world to see what he saw, feel what he felt. I tried to forget Mingo. I tried to forget passion with other men. I refused to see Clan, and I would have refused Randy, had he been at home to refuse, but he was in Chicago attending the national Olympic track and field. And I vowed that upon his return would put a halt to our rendezvous.

I went to church, always remaining after everyone had left to talk to Simon. I carried my Bible daily, and whenever thoughts of Mingo invaded my tortured mind, I took out my Bible and read the passages Simon had marked. They were but fruitless saltless words, print on white, ink on paper.

without meaning, without purpose.

"Mingo said animals do it, so if animals do it it can't be very wrong, or sinful," I related to Simon one Sunday afternoon as we sat on a hill in that early part of spring, looking out over the pasture. The sun was low, an orb of gold, and flung eerie shadows out from the horses and cows grazing in the distance. I was lonely for Mingo, and battling that loneliness, his touch, his madness, I sought the balm of Simon.

"Animals do not have souls," he had replied, his blue eyes piercing mine, calming my inner rage. "Besides, there is no right or wrong in their world. If they have sex relations with their own sex it is from a baser instinct, and not from a special kind of desire."

"Ah . . . you said a special kind of desire," I shouted, pointing a finger at him. "Why special . . . cause you like it?"

He lifted an eyebrow, then gazed across the emerald valley.

"You are forever suspecting me, aren't you?" he said. "By special I mean different, varying from the normal. Instinctive, not wanton in a certain way . . . not special way . . . as you would have me think."

"Maybe man's is instinctive . . . like Mingo and me," I ranted, stubborn to the last. We had learned to discuss this matter openly, without blushing, without embarrassment.

"Always you and Mingo," he said simply, frown-

ing. "Cutty, aren't you ever going to really try ... to get him and sex off your mind?"

"Oh, don't look at me like that, and don't talk so stern!"

"I wasn't aware that I was stern."

His face was suddenly white. He looked down at me with an expression I could not gauge. Frankly, I adored his sternness, I too adored his look of weariness, for his thoughts, his concern was for me. And I longed hopefully and passionately for his touch. For now, after being with him so much, and in a different way, all this winter and birth of spring, for now, though it was too late, I loved him . . . Not with any love of earth, that was spoiled for us both, but with a grave amorousness kin to that of the saints, the passion that the Magdalen might have felt for Christ. The other love should have been his too, the passion I felt for Mingo, and would have run in the footsteps of this love, like a young animal after its mother, but Mingo intervened.

Seeing him sitting next to me like this, his eyes so forlorn, so sad, I cried helplessly:

"Won't you ever care for me, Simon?"

"Now, Cutty, we must have truth between us," he said, dodging my question. "I must know something, something that has bothered me for a long time."

"What?" I cried eagerly, clutching for hope, any hope.

"Did you go with Mingo of your own free will?"
I was silent. I could not answer that.

"You must have done so, or why go a second time? Did you?"

I shivered, like that first night we talked in the snow. A hundred years ago now it seemed, so many days and nights without Mingo.

"Yes, Simon, I went, but I didn't want to go. I didn't."

"Now, Cutty, how can both be true?"

"They can."

"How did he compel you to go then?"

I tried to think of an illustration, so that he could understand.

"Like a whip-o-will fetches its mate out of the grass."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing."

"Then how?"

I looked at him, tormented by all the memories of Mingo, times he would never . . . could never understand.

"There's things harder than words, Simon. Words are nothing."

"Go on. I want to hear what you've got to say."

"Simon, it was like there was some kind of secret between us, and I had to find it out."

"Did you find it out?"

I turned away, but he caught hold of my arm and pulled me back, made me look at him.

"I don't do it anymore," I cried, thinking of my loss.

"Then . . . it is true what he told me, that you

were his from head to foot?"

I flushed, infuriated.

"Oh, Simon! You've talked to him."

He stared into the evening distance.

"I had to."

"For what reason?"

"Just to find out . . . whose fault it was."

I turned on him like a small fury.

"You think it was mine?"

"I should have killed him, then and there," he said. "Then—you were his . . . body and soul."

"Not soul!"

"You've told me a good many lies, Cutty. Sin upon sin! All for you and that savage."

"Oh, Simon, speak kind!"

"What a fool I am," he went on, as if he had not heard me. "You must hate me now for interrupting your little honeymoon with him. Of course you have gone back, even after that night . . . with me." He choked. "And I thought you were as pure as an angel . . . that night."

I bowed my face in my hands. The kildeers were out, flitting over the new grass, and their chirps were to me like maddening screams.

"I couldn't help it," I managed to utter, considering Mingo's power to my frail strength. "There are some things you just don't understand, Simon, and perhaps will never understand."

"I understand more than you think," he said, beginning to confess. "I've knelt at my bedside and fought my instincts, and they are good instincts. I

have a right to them. I have given up more than you can ever guess. I've disgraced my calling on the account of you, and the ironic thing about it all is that I was willing to disgrace it."

My heart stirred with hope and, looking at him, I said:

"I'm much obliged for all that, Simon. But you, you could have me . . . we could have each other . . . without you giving up your preaching, your God."

"Now how would that look," he said, frowning. "Giving myself to God on Sunday and wallowing with you the other six."

"You make it sound so awesome, so nasty in a way."

"Well . . . isn't it?"

"To some perhaps," I answered, determined. "Those who are so narrow minded they can never see it any other way. Can you honestly say that that night . . . that it was awful . . . now can you?"

"I refuse to talk about it."

"Narrow-minded, huh?"

"Now, see here, Cutty."

"Well, it's the truth, isn't it? You refuse to see or believe anything except through your own narrow views . . . like some kind of fairy tale."

"I realize the facts, as far as we are concerned."

"No, you don't, Simon. You see them as other people see them, as the church would see them. You think what we did together repulsive because you were raised to think it, just as you were raised to think that Mary conceived through a spirit lover,

through an invisible father, that Jesus died on the cross and rose again. You cannot believe nor accept any other answer, no matter how possible. Just like us that night. You think all that was dirty, because you were taught from birth that it is dirty. But suppose men did that, and it was a common thing among men, then would you think it dirty? No, you would not."

His eyes were filled with water as he gazed into mine.

"Why do you try and confuse me, Cutty? Why do you twist things? Why do you want me to denounce my God, to turn from church, to give up everything I've been taught to come with you, into your dark world, a world that so far has given you little happiness?"

I thought for a moment on what he had said.

"I would be happy, Simon, if other folks did not meddle in my business, did not try and change me."

"Would you really, Cutty? I think not." His eyes began to shine now, like tiny stars. "Don't you see, Cutty, don't you see that even in your confession of unrest you are confessing that there is a God, and because there is a God, you all the more realize that what you are doing is wrong. That is why you wrestle with this thing."

"And that is why you wrestle?" I asked, and with a sharp tongue.

He blinked, then looked away again. His hands, clasped together, began to fidget.

"Cutty, I can forgive much, for I love much. But I can't renounce more. Please don't ask me to give up something that I have cherished all my life, that I have wanted to do all my life."

I understood his plight then, and something within me, something of my spirit lit up, like a lamp turned up on the horizon of my mind. In truth, he liked me, wanted me, even with sex, but he wanted his God, to his church . . . and I understood this readily. He was being torn between the two, as I was being torn between him and Mingo. If this was his tragic moment it was also mine, and I suddenly felt sorry for him, deeply, and this increased my love for him all the more.

"Simon," I said, "Would it be so wrong when two people care, regardless who they are? Like you and me, and you do care, Simon, you must. Would God condemn us for that? Couldn't we care for one another . . . without this other?"

"It would be like that marriage which is no marriage," he said, as if a wild mastery possessed him. "We would be that companionable and inspiring thing . . . norms. I was born to be in the world wide company of men that work, marry, bring up children, maybe see their grandchildren, and then, in the glory of fulfillment, lay my silver head on the pillow of sleep. I have always loved normal things. I am not one of those who are set apart by the strange aloofness of genius, whose souls burn with a wild light . . . like you, Cutty . . . instead of with the comfortable glow of the hearth fire. I am an

ordinary man, loving ordinary things. Neither am I effeminate or a celibate by instinct, though I do not have Mingo's fury of masculinity. Sex would never have awakened in me for you but at the touch of spiritual love as well. But the touch has come. It has awakened. It threatens to master me. There is nothing to keep me from laying my hand on the latch, to lift it and find you there . . . waiting . . . love, triumph, intoxication! But what stands between you and me is not God, not the church, not my own shame, but your own helplessness, your own personality, which to me is like a delicate glass that will break if I stir. So, rather than break that glass I will not stir."

"Then . . . it is too late," I said softly, thinking that the end of the world had come if we could not be together, if he was not with me always to straighten me out when I erred.

"All that could matter is me and you," he answered surprisingly. "My passion, your freedom . . . your freedom to love whom you please, how you please. I could enforce my rights, lift the latch. But the selfish use of strength, like Mingo, seems to me a despicable thing. I have made my decision, Cutty, but I know, and I must tell you this, so you will always know, that it would have been so easy to make the opposite one. How easy and how sweet!"

I looked at him and he looked at me, and the sunset lay on our faces in a fanfare of gold, just as it lay on the meadows and the fields and the dense woods.

"Then, there is no use for me to ever hope that you will change your decision," I said then, feeling the loss, the urgent pain in my heart.

"Not the way you want it, Cutty," he said, rather whispered the words. "Not the way I want it, but the way it must be."

"Then, you don't care if I still see Mingo?" I asked, knowing, even as I asked, that I should never see Mingo again.

He was gravely silent for a moment.

"Yes I care. I will always care. And I don't want you to see him, ever, do you hear?"

I nodded. I heard but I did not want to hear. It made my heart glad that he cared so much, but grieved that I would have to give up both.

"Then, I have lost everything," I muttered frankly.

Surprisingly, he caught my hand and held it in his for a moment.

"You have everything to live for . . . yourself."

Yes, myself, I thought then, on that chilly sunset hill, and many, many times hence. How dull life is, when you have only yourself to live for.

Once more, desperately, I tried to live as Simon wished that I live, not for my sake now . . . or for God . . . I had tried that . . . but for him. I was good because he alone wanted me to be good.

In the lanes, at the barn, the store, when Mingo and I met, my body would go limp, his pale blue eyes piercing, it would seem, my whole being, and I would welter in an agony that required all my

strength, all my reserves, all my interests in Simon not to run to him, fall into his huge bronze arms let him take me roughly, let me once more feel his enormous dark instrument of pain.

Though his eyes were always hauntingly on mine, following me, I could feel, he kept his reserve as well as I, and I reasoned it was on account of Simon's talk with him. That he was hurt was certain. It showed profoundly in everything he did every move he made, every gesture while in my presence. And when our hands touched, as they sometimes did when we were busy working together in the store, I trembled like a thief, and he would move away quickly, occupy himself with some other task.

It was a hard thing for me . . . to live as Simon wanted me to live, to give up passion, when I was so very young, virile, hot with flowing sap, instinctively passionate, and harder still when I had to face Mingo, be around him, skirt his world but not permitted to enter it. And harder still . . . to be under the watchful eyes of Simon, to have God and all his convictions, his numerous laws, some which made no sense to me, crammed down my throat.

Even harder still to try and make amends with Mama, though I had no problems of the soul with Papa. His world was fixed, and I had no place in it. He went unsuspecting (Papa never had the sharp piercing eyes of Mama, that watchful sentinel over the fold), and never reprimanded me as long as I kept the store going and the cash register tallying

with the flux of cash and commodities. In fact, since he was an unlearned man, he relied on my schooling, my quick mind for figures, and pretty well left me alone with it.

Mama, in her great Christian crusade, her one request in life to take as many souls as she could into the Golden Kingdom when she went, and me her prime candidate, was never tiring in her determination to shield me from the devil . . . and from Mingo.

And I think she knew. I *knew* she knew!

They say that the good never concern their thoughts with the evil. I say this is not so. It is the evil there in them that make them seem good. Mama was good, but there was evil in her, a suspicious evil, an idea in her that all around her evil lurked waiting to be saved. But, maybe the good have an extra sense of prevision, can detect evil in others, like Mama detected the evil in me and in Mingo . . . if that can be called an evil. In those dark futile days I thought it was evil, because she and Simon and people like them led me to believe that anything of the flesh is evil. Later, I have thought otherwise, that all passions of the flesh are but instinctive calls of which we have no control, and that if God had not intended us to have them then he would have created us without them.

The house was full of old paintings, particularly those of that peculiarly seedy and emasculated type which modern religion seemed at that time (1927) to produce, and which Mama always

bought with the allowance money papa gave her and which she lingered over. Especially the one she had of the Crucifixion, which she liked the best a subject on which the artists had lavished all the slumbering instincts of torture that are in so many people . . . people like Mama, and a great number of old women, who have transformed their religion of passion and love-giving into condemnation and cruelty.

Once, when I was small, I had asked Mama about the old picture hanging in the hall of the Crucifixion (the hall is filled with them now).

"Why, that is Jesus Christ dying for us," she had answered.

I had been so puzzled by that.

"Not for me!" I had protested.

"But why?" she had asked of me, equally puzzled.

"Why should anyone die for me?"

"It is needed that man should die for the people," she had tried to explain, but in vain. "Only through blood can sin be washed white."

"But blood makes things raddled, not white," I had cried. "And if anyone's got to die, then I'll die for myself."

That has always left an unexplained vacuum in my mind, to this day, why Christ had to die for us, if he had to die at all. Since Christianity has been a continual scene of bloodshed, suffering and persecution. It has brought not peace, but a sword to the world.

But I hoped frantically, desperately, that it brought peace to Mama. Before Easter of '27 she died, and ten days later Papa followed her.

She died thinking I was a misfit, a paradox—both man and woman, and my atonement was doubled then; my efforts to be like her and Simon presented a hard fought goal. Not that her dying made it easier for me to become a Christian. Nay, it made it all the harder. For I had her memory of me, and I realized that, no matter how hard I tried to better my life, her impression of me before she went still held, unless she could see me from the grave.

The day before she died her garden in front of the house was full of old, sad-colored flowers that had lost all their names except the country ones. Chief among them, by reason of its hardihood . . . since April in these parts it is yet still cold . . . was a small plant called Virgin's pride. Its ephemeral petals, pale and bee-haunted, fluttered like banners of some lost, forgotten cause. The garden, from front to back, was hazy with their demure, faintly scented flowers, and the voices of the bees came up in a soft roar, triumphantly as the voices of victors returning with hard-worn spoil.

That evening, about dusk, as I was tucking her in bed she caught and held my hand.

"Cutty," she said weakly, her tired old eyes streaked with a faint glitter. "Why should you care if Bonnie Ragland has freckles, or if Helena has a turned up nose, or if Delta Lee is a red head, why should you care?"

"Why do you ask, Mama?" I cried, completely puzzled.

"Cause you've been so good to me, and you Papa. And you should receive love, not just give it (if she only knew!), and I'd like to see you happy before I go . . . married to some nice girl."

"Oh, Mama, you're not going to die," I murmured, remembering (with a fright of my conscience) my recklessness.

But she died; then Papa—who loved her to distraction, though he never spoke it to her, not one word of affection, not one pat, not one kiss. I guess some people can love like that, but I never could. And when I asked Simon about it afterwards he said:

"Cutty, the embrace of the eyes can be stronger than the embrace of the arms."

Simon!

I do not know what I would have done had it not been for him during the two funerals, and them so close together. And he turned God in my eyes, standing there over the graves heaped with flowers, saying those forlorn fatal words, but with a voice like a saint's, his golden hair trapped in the strands of the new sun, his fine clean hands closing over the smallness of mine when the funeral was over, and saying:

"Not a hair of thy head shall perish."

And I strangely thought of what he had said that wintery night before he went to bed with me at the house . . . the turbulence of the waters, and knew

now what he meant. He was speaking of his turbulence, not mine, and now he was asking God to spare me . . . and for whose sake?

So, there was nothing left to do but put the house in order, and attend to the hundred and one things demanded of one after a death. Mingo helped like a Trojan, and Simon came by often, and took numerous meals with me. Suddenly I found myself in possession of all Papa and Mama owned, quite a responsibility for one so young, but I clung to everything like a miser, not daring to make a change . . . in remembrance of them. Even the awesome religious paintings Mama had cherished, which I had promised myself years ago I would burn if I had the chance, but having the chance I could not . . . for her sake, and Simon's, who loved them dearly, but differently . . . thank God!

Then, out of the blue, Randy returned from Chicago.

He came with a burst of new knowledge, about the places he had seen, the wonderful people he had met . . . including some strange ones . . . and with a trunk of trophy ribbons. He was quick to set a date.

He had bought a new car, a 1927 Duesenberg, and one night we drove down to the lake, the place of our beginning.

I felt a pang of guilt all the way, remembering Simon, his serene quietness as he sat under the golden lamplight in my living room, a cup of coffee in one hand, his soft pink lips speaking of things up

and beyond this earthly world, and I could not wait to tell Randy that he and I could not . . . do . . . anything anymore, that Simon had changed my way of life.

"Do you expect me to believe that," he said, when I had told him everything. "You like to have it packed as well as the next one."

"Not anymore," I said, though I lied. I suppose I would always love the unpredictable passion of men. "I have changed—Since Simon."

"So now Simon's getting it," he cried, almost bitterly.

"What a thing to say," I replied, looking over at him sharply.

He sat there, silent for a while, immaculate in his white pants, white shoes, and maroon coat. He lit a cigarette and puffed on it hastily, blowing the smoke out in deliberate puffs.

"Well . . . there are other asses," he said finally, his eyes on the moonlit lake, as if studying every ripple. "Other beds, Cutty, and other asses, and dicks to suck, if I want to suck them."

I looked at him, startled. He was so brutally frank, so cold.

"What a terrible thing to say!"

He clicked his tongue between his teeth, then gave a shrug.

"Not terrible at all, Cutty. I just can't help being disappointed. I thought of you all the time I was in Chicago, at the Olympics, every night in the hotel. I just can't believe you're turning me down,

after all these weeks."

I felt sorry for him, and he was such a handsome, beguiling boy. Had such a way, a naturalness that won for him the things he wanted.

"I'm sorry things have turned out this way," I said, and I meant this profoundly. I wanted passion, this male wildness, this dazzling secrecy, this stolen ecstasy. I wanted also the purity that was Simon, his golden edged world, his clouds with their silver linings. "I do not intend to let another man have me, to screw me, not like you did, Randy. I have got to stop sometime, so I may as well stop with you."

"Just like that," he spat, snapping a finger in my face. "Just call a halt . . . just bye, bye blackbirds . . . like in the song. Is that being fair, Cutty, truly, is that being fair . . . to us both?"

I was silent for a moment. Nothing seemed fair anymore.

"I feel that I am doing us both a favor. Then, we can walk down a street, any street, and hold up our heads, and not feel any shame."

"Goddamned, Cutty!" he cried, flinging the words at me like the last of a whip. "Do you think I am going to give up sex . . . with men, hell no! Do you think I am going to put on a saintly robe like you are trying to do, pious, like that Brother Simon! Yes this, and no this, and smile and bow and quote Scriptures and still end up in Hell, like you and he will end up. I intend to live my life to the hilt, and I mean the hilt! And when I say hilt,

baby, I mean my rod up to the hilt, hair and nuts and all!"

"You would screw someone else?" I asked meekly.

"Boy! are you the one . . . you take the cake! Would I screw someone else! Cutty, baby. What would you have me do, have myself castrated! Or would you like for me just to dry up and turn to seed?"

"I wouldn't like that!"

"Or become a neuter, like that Simon?"

"He is no neuter," I cried, defending everything I loved, admired about Simon. "He is a vigorous male, full of life, and is masculine."

"And I bet you know all about his masculinity, don't you?"

"That isn't fair, Randy."

"Oh, it isn't fair! Are you fair? Do you want me to spend the rest of my life screwing Maggie and her four daughters, to spert cum all over my butt. I want to put it into you, baby, spert it into you, not on the ground, and it says in the bible, to quote you one, my dear. It says it is better to put it in the belly of a whore than on the ground . . . ah, I've got you on that one."

"So you think I'm a whore?"

"Hell no," he ranted, giving a puff on his cigarette, his hand poised directly in front of his face. "And you know I don't. I'm just saying you can save me from sin by letting me put it in you, instead of on the ground."

"You are mocking me."

He thumped the cigarette out, watched it slowly burn its destination of last years leaves.

"All I am doing, Cutty, is trying to make you understand that I want you, that I love you. There! You've made me say it! I just want us to be together again, like we use to be."

"I understand all that, Randy," I replied, squirming in my seat, fighting so many worlds, yet wanting not to fight them. "I just wish Simon had never come here, had never pointed out things to me."

"You won't even give me a kiss."

I looked at him then, seated across from me, his face like a small boy's in the glow of moonlight, and I thought how impulsive he still was, how persuasive. He had not changed a fathom, while I . . . while I had lived a hundred years since last we met. I bent and kissed him warmly on the lips. His arms instantly went around me, drew me to him, this time not in passion, not in longing, but as a friend. He was glad to see me, and I felt that gladness seep into me as I melted into his arms.

"You make it so wonderful to be back," he whispered in my ear. "You make me belong, as no other can make me belong. Do you remember what good times we use to have, right here, on this very same spot?"

Did I remember? How could I forget?

I thought of his wonderful body over mine, his passion that had more love in it than brutal sex,

own clothes, some but dropping their pants, others getting completely naked. With glaring eyes, and with a dumb terror, I gazed round at the awesome proceedings. A vivid picture branded itself on my whirling brain. I felt the forerunner of pain and I almost fainted at the realization.

Oddly, as I would remember later, I called out for help, but I did not call for Mingo, nor Simon, nor Randy nor Clan, not even Papa. Strangely, and like a small defenseless child, I called, "Mama!"

"We gonna give yo the screwin' ah didn't get to give you that day, remember," Elbert cried through a gaping mouth, his face so close to mine I could smell his rancid breath, a stench, a mixture of tobacco and cheap boot-leg whiskey. He grabbed me by the hair, and bumped my head against the icy fender.

"Bring up his lover, and let him watch," he cried fiercely, motioning to the blurred pack of boys who held Randy fast. They instantly obeyed, pushing Randy up directly affronting me. His sparkling eyes on me longingly, had in their glare the look of death, the horror of something he only partially understood, and that made the horror to him a hundredfold worse. When Randy really saw their intentions at last, something broke in his mind. He went mad. "Mercy! Have mercy, for God's sake!" he gasped, his face breaking, like prayer, into wild, anguish sobs.

"I can't look! I can't look!" he shouted into their downcast faces. "Please . . . don't make me look!"

Rough, field calloused hands caught his hair and forced his eyes on me. Then, with my legs spread and tied to the bumper, I suddenly felt the touch of warm flesh on my thighs, then a jab, then a sharp volley of flaming pain! I tried to turn round, to see who it was, but my arms were strung, like Christ's, too tightly for me to move.

Then, in that one instant, life became for me a hideous nightmare. One by one, demon after demon, body after body in a long orgy of sex, forms out of the darkness, hard forms, each armed with the sharpest of instruments, for each was deathly blunt on the ends, and throttled with the worst kind of ignition—lust! And lust spiced with malice, toned and made hideous with ridicule, with mocking play, becomes something not understandable to anyone save the victim. And the victim, which I had become, knows something about pain and torture that no other man can know, nor can describe, unless he too becomes victimized.

Sperm ran down my thighs, streamed down the fender of the car, and made of my rectum a gory mass of butter, of slick pulp, like flesh beaten into jelly, and as each shape had his fill of me, jabbing into me with the deliberation of giving pain, more than bent on receiving pleasure, the groove they made, like a blunt knife gouging into soft wood, making the opening larger with each jab, the intense pain became as something else, only the pressure of their hard legs, their bodies riding over mine, and the dull agony prodding into the deeper

recesses of my groin, deeper than the preceeding instrument, which struck new nerves, at the instant I thought the pain had ended, pain anew, like relentless needles, flashed through every crevice of my body, even to my thrust out toes, paralyzed, and my coiling fingertips.

How long this went on there is no way of knowing. How many bodies? How many hard, enormous, merciless tools? Each one seemed larger, more cruel, more desperate to inflict pain than the one before, and I invented visions of what would be the last . . . if they had served for me, in that long line of serving, what they considered their choice portion of their serving. Did they hold something special in reserve? Was this something to be the climaxing act to their gruesome little tableau?

As Randy screamed I saw it in a sickening vision of nausea. It was in the form of a huge black, a young buck who they had tied up, and dragged now to the scene. He was naked, and when they stood him up before me he was like a black giant, his thighs as thick as the trunks of trees, his shiny organ like that of a young uncut horse.

"Get on that, boy!" Elbert shouted, or, I thought it was Elbert, there were so many voices alike, southern voices I had heard once in frivolous play, in boyish laughter, in tease at Papa's store. "An stay on it, yuh hear! Stay on it and fuck it til ah tells you to quit."

They slammed the boy onto me, and for a tense moment he merely rubbed his black flanks against

my rectum, his frantic fears, his terror of what they might do to him, robbing him of willing passion. But robust and healthy as a young animal, ultimately of the physical, he began to squirm. His huge hands pressed down on my hips, and a moment more he entered me, not cruelly like the boys of my school years, for he was not playing some hideous, merciless game with me, but to do what he had to do and with as much care as he could not to wound me further.

But then, probably under the power of strain, I do not know what his passion got the better of him, despite his bloodthirsty onlookers, and my whole body throbbed, like the beat of a full pulse, and I felt choked through and through, my body but a thin shell, his huge black rod filling me from lining to lining. Once, as I remembered afterwards, a boy at school had stuck a broom straw clean through a green lizard's body, entering it through its tiny rectum and drawing it out through his mouth. I felt this way then, like the lizard, who had died afterwards.

I fainted from the pain, as the black organ, like a giant piston, drove to and from, and with the uncertain motion of a frenzied run-away machine, one thrust short, the next driving to my rib cage. And when I came to, after hearing dully someone's voice yelling, "Now get! You black sonofabitch! An if you tell, we'll kill you, see!" I was lying on the cold ground, alone, the boys gone, Randy gone, the car gone.

Pulling my clothes about me, disheveled, my body smeared with blood, wracked with fire-hot pain, I attempted to get my bearings, to draw together my shattered faculties. I could hear the faint lapping of the water on the mud banks, the cold wind through the new leaves of the trees, the sighing moss, and, rising feebly, I tried to make my way home . . . no, not home, but to Mingo!

Mingo would help me!

Again, I thought wearily, painfully, like the time when Elbert Courtney had raped me, he had picked me up kindly into his strong brown arms, had doctored me, had rubbed my aching body, had healed my broken sorrow with his rich outpouring of love. He would do that again, and at the thought I tried to run, to hurry my pace, but my flight was impeded by the awesome, almost unbearable agony in the vicinity of my rectum. In fact, my whole body throbbed from bruises and from their merciless organs. They must have beaten me afterwards. I looked at my torn clothes, felt my face, the broken skin, my bulging lip, my eye agonizing to the touch, and the torn flesh along my chest and ribs.

As I half hurried along that dark, winding road there came to mind what Simon had once told me: to take a fool's advice, he had said and leave this place. Well, I knew now that I should have listened to him, should have found somewhere in the world a place that could and would patronize my kind, and if not patronize then at least tolerate

my affliction . . . which I considered no affliction. But maybe I was afflicted. They say that the insane never think they are insane, so maybe I, in my affliction did not recognize my affliction. But now . . . now the worst had been done to me, and when I had so earnestly tried to alter my emotions, to curb what passions I had, when I had tried to reverse all my convictions to follow the path of the normal.

It was almost dawn when I reached the valley leading into Mingo's cabin, the red agony of the sky ranged round the crimson horizon like a giant caldron of a blacksmith's shop. The red light fell on my own being, mixing with the drying blood, dyeing everything about me the hue of scarlet.

Leaning against the door, I rapped three times. There was no answer. I thrust open the door and went in. Mingo was gone. With faint heart, I glanced about the tiny room. His silver ring, with the jade figure of Abba Inca on it, lay in the middle of the furry bed, and I picked it up and placed it absently on my right hand. With misery and uncertainty howling in every vein, my physical agony of the assault momentarily forgotten, I realized the ring was a message for me, but what message? Had he gone permanently? Had he left our valley for some far distant place, and this ring was a memento of his affection for me?

My mind whirled like a treadmill.

Miserable, sick of mind and weary of body, my last hope fled with the fleeing of Mingo, I had come

to the end of life's road. With throbbing, pounding heart I sank beside the warm fur bed and lay my weary head upon its softness, my tired mind conjuring memories of Mingo, his warmth, his love, his ultimate kindness, remembering how he had taken me in that time, as he had taken in stray animals, a lame duck, a flying squirrel, a baby deer drenched from the rain and cold, which he had lain by the fire, and a starry eyed coon, and I thought of his tall dark body longingly, even with waifs of passion included, how the dark hollow in his loins breathed the masculine glory of his sex, how the black hair shone in the firelight, how his wire-hair-covered thighs chafed while they caressed me. I thought of all these things, mysteriously, hauntingly, as the bread of life. Nothing else mattered, really. What was life without passion, without love.

But I had lost him now. Mingo was gone. Maybe with a broken heart. His ring told me all this, and looking down at it, I rubbed it fondly. I kissed it. I longed for Mingo's touch. Longed for him to ease my shame . . . he who did not recognize shame.

The door suddenly opened and, glancing round, I saw that it was Simon. I looked back at the ring.

"I thought I would find you here," he said to me, coming to my side. I did not even favor him with a look. I was too full of shame for that. "Cutty, I've heard about what happened last night, about what they did to you."

"You have?" I said, glancing up at him. So he knew now. He knew everything, about Randy and

me . . . everything.

"It must have been awful for you." He bent down beside me, stroked back my hair. "You're a sight. I've got to get you to a doctor."

"No!" I protested. It no longer mattered. Nothing mattered.

"But, Cutty," he said, embracing me firmly. "You're in bad shape. You need medical attention. Come, I'll give you a hand." He started to rise.

"No!" I shouted disrespectfully. "In the shape I'm in, my shame. Don't you know what they did to me . . . really did?"

"Yes, Cutty, I know," he answered, and his eyes were thoughtful, kind. "They're in jail, every last one of them. And they found that boy . . . Elbert Courtney down by the road, strangled, dead!"

"Dead?" I said, my mind troubled, wandering.

He reached in his pocket and withdrew an article of some kind. I glanced at it. It was the sea biscuit fossil stone on the leather thong which Mingo had worn.

"For your information, for it interests you," he said, holding out the stone. "This was found in Elbert's hand."

"God! Mingo did it," I cried. "Good for Mingo." Then I added, with my heart in my mouth. "That is why he left . . . left me . . . for good."

Simon nodded.

"He won't be back."

"Gone to his people?" I asked feebly, feeling sick.

"I don't know, Cutty. At least let us hope he is

safe, wherever he is."

"We?" I cried bitterly, looking with hard eyes up to him. "Why suddenly this 'we'? You never cared for him."

"That isn't so," he replied. "I never understood the man."

"Well, he was a kinder man than most," I said, defending him to my last breath. "Not like most, hard and cold. He knew what he wanted, and was man enough to take it."

Simon's eyes glanced away.

"And you think I don't know what I want?" he asked seriously.

"You know what you want," I explained. "You just won't take it."

He lay his face near mine, his arms hugging me warmly.

"Maybe I've been some kind of fool," he lamented, his eyes lit with dawn. "But everything is turning out for the best . . . as is God's will."

"There is no God!" I spat back at him, wiggling free of his embrace.

"Don't say there is no God."

"If there was, do you think he would allow to happen to me what happened. If there was a God to be worshipped, as you pretend to worship, do you think he would make men like those boys I went to school with, who—who took me just for the joke of it?"

"He works in mysterious ways," Simon informed me, and with his liquid tongue.

"He don't work at all," I stammered. "What have I done to him, that he should do this to me. Why did he make me the way I am, if he did not intend for me to live like I am?"

"Cutty, maybe this is his way of saving you."

"Saving me!" I stormed, my wrath bringing on a new sensation of pains to my body. "It was you and not God who could have saved me!"

"How so?" he asked, his eyes glittered.

"You could have saved me as a man," I cried, tormented, revengeful that life had turned out like it had. "I needed you, Simon. I needed your purity, your kindness, your strength. I needed your guidance, wanted you to be with me, help me, help me find my way back, if I've sinned so. You *could* have come and lived at the house. It could have been your parsonage. You could have lifted me up out of my doldrums, could have preached, then shown my own soul its way by your love, your kind of love, not mine. But you didn't. You were called to save souls, souls that needed saving. What kind of preacher are you if you stay with those whose souls are already saved? Even Christ did better than you. That is why he kept the sinners around him, money grabbers, harlots, thieves, for it was their souls he wanted to save, not the good ones."

"Oh, Cutty, I do love you," he stammered, as I began to sob, my whole body shaking, trembling with convulsions. He embraced me, kissed me warmly on the cheek.

I flung him away.

"Don't touch me anymore," I sobbed. "Not like a God. If you ever touch me again, touch me like a man."

"I will, Cutty, I will," he said slowly, and there was deep passion in his tone. "Just give me time . . . just give me time."

CHAPTER SIX

So . . . it is all gone over now, the struggling and the troubling of the waters.

Brother Simon did come and live with me. We made Papa's and Mama's home into a parsonage, with its rows and rows of religious paintings, and we held Sunday School there out in Mama's flower garden on warm sunshiny days, and the profits from the store went into much planning and preparation for better Youth Centers for the young folks in Rankin county, and for a Recreation Hall and Prayer Room. And the place here where Mama and Papa lived is now called Simon's Little Mountain, and to the left of the house, where a field once was, under the umbrella magnolias has been turned into a cemetery, and I have had my folks brought from the old cemetery grounds and placed here, next to the house they both loved.

And Simon . . . comes and goes in the golden sunlight of my future life, what my life had been, and what it will go on to be, and he stands out to me, in my heart and in my mind, his golden hair blowing in the wind, his ruddy face dark with an outdoor tan, his blue eyes still stormy with their turbulence, and his fine body youthful, as only purity can keep it.

He is no longer a god in my eyes, but a man.

His mere touch is more maddening than all of Mingo's fiery body, his animal passion.

But I have not forgotten Mingo nor his dark savage body nor the cabin in the wildwoods, which has fallen now into decay. I wanted to keep it restored to its former elegance . . . elegant to me for there love dwelt, but thought better of it when Simon instructed me to, "make way for the new Jerusalem."

But I have wondered what happened to Mingo. I have not wondered about the others. Randy, Clan, and the heathens I went to school with and who hung around the store on Saturdays teasing me, courting. They have gone on their way, to other places, other worlds. I saw Randy but once after that awesome night. I was in a store at Brandon buying some velvet ribbon as book markers when he came in. He just stood there for a moment looking at me, then said, "I'm sorry," before he passed on and out of the store.

Yes, the whole world is sorry. Randy summed it up in a few words.

But Mingo, no, I will not forget him. The pain is gone, the agony, for Simon long since has eased all that by his own personality, his own brand of impulsiveness. But sometimes, when I am out walking in the woods, down along the sandbars of the river, which I often do, I look to the sky, and I wonder where he is, if he is alive or dead, or, like Papa once said about Indians.

Ignorant, superstitious, victimized by old legends and old folk tales, some he believed and some he did not believe (and none which I believed myself) but this legend says: that the Indian came from the moon, and that the Indians who lived there were banished, those who had committed evils, and were allowed to live for a while on earth. Then, long after, the evil Indians on earth waged war on the Indians on the moon, and lost, and were turned into wolves. And that here on earth the wolves still have memory of that great strife, and only superficially hold truce. And when the moon is full, and the night is warm, the wolf still laments its long-lost heritage with a mournful howl.

A legend still, but on one long spring night, when the mating season among wolves in these parts bring on occasional howls, and the moon was full, I lay in bed beside Simon tossing and turning, unable to sleep, a strange premonition drawing me from sleep and rest. The wolves were keeping up their noise in the far dense reaches of the woods and, slipping out of the house, with Mingo's necklace . . . why I took this I did not know . . . I went into the woods, as if conjured, drawn. And there in a silvery patch of moonlight sat a lean timber wolf, huge of flank, white of eyes, and I crept up to him.

Strangely, he licked my hand, and in some kind of animal reverie, and—like going back into time the night Mingo took my body, I felt suddenly, the sense of mystery, of secrecy, of awe. And I placed the stone fossil about the neck of the wolf, then he

bounded off, lost in the darkness.

I felt carzy after that, as if life had played me a dirty trick. I did not believe, naturally, that Mingo had turned into a wolf, but I felt somehow, that by placing the fossil about the wolf's neck, I was in my own terms saying farewell to Mingo ... the man who had loved me only too briefly ... and only too well.

Now, I stand at the edge of the sky. Me on one side of the horizon, Simon on the other. Dark forms coming together out of the worlds of our opposite existence; he with his contentment from lifting me up with his love, me content to be lifted.

Between us, in the world somewhere, between the fury of my passion and the surrender of his, lies saffron peace.

The future lies before me like an opened book, a carpet unwound upon which I walk, step by step.

But why is life so tragic? It is like a little bridge over an abyss. You look down. You become giddy. And you wonder how you will ever make it to the end.

The End

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A FOOL'S ADVICE

I know now that it was they, those hot-eyed tantalizing country boys, who awoke me, arousing within me the passion, the ecstasy, the despair, the loneliness I feel today.

It was they who turned the key in the lock, who opened my eyes to passion, who converted my every thought, my every ambition to the love of my own sex.

It was they who lifted my soul to their altar-block, my own body the sacrifice for their pent-up passions, my ignorance, my willingness — their ravishment!